The New Criterion

May 2001

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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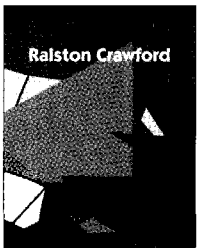

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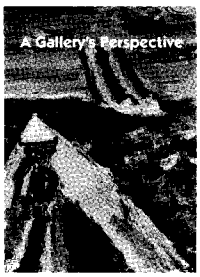

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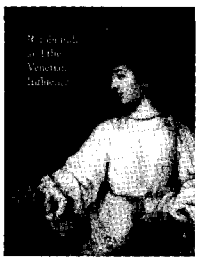

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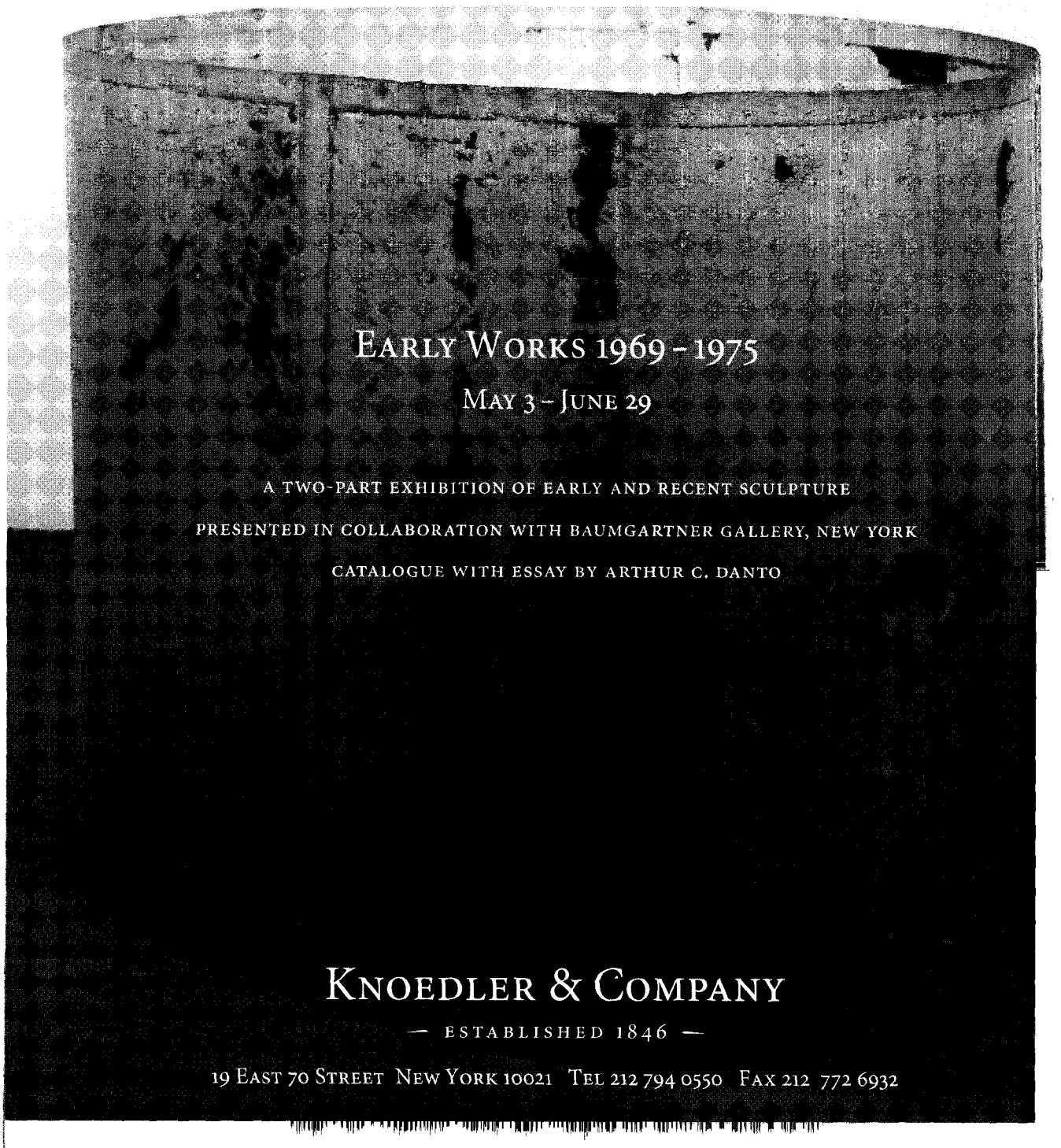

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Notes & Comments: May 2001

"Breaking new ground"

Wouldn't it be nice if we could declare a moratorium on the use of certain grand sounding but effectively pernicious phrases and ideas? Near the top of our list would come "critical thinking." In the context of discussions about education, the phrase is supposed to denote an important intellectual advance beyond the old-fashioned concern with "content." Perhaps you remember content? It is an important part of what, in the bad old days, one would go to school to obtain: a mastery of particular names, dates, facts, works, and ideas. Critical thinkers are beyond all that. They substitute sophistication for content, subordinating a concern with mastery of particulars to a superior intellectual attitude. Instead of laboring to understand the works of Dante or Milton, they step back and pontificate about the meaning of reading in general. They no longer worry about getting the details of Plato's or Descartes's or Kant's philosophy right—indeed, they find it risible that anyone could believe that being "right" about such things was ever more than a matter of fashion. Instead, they ponder the philosophy of philosophy. For devotées of "critical thinking," there is something indescribably naff about mastering any particular body of knowledge or affirming any traditional conclusions. That is what drudges do. The only interesting narrative is the metanarrative of thinking about the process of thinking, preferably from an adversarial vantage point. Thus it is that "critical thinking" is held to be so much more *creative* than the ordinary, unmodified sort of thinking, just as criticism unredeemed by an antinomian theory of criticism is regarded as a hopelessly pedestrian enterprise.

The origins of the vogue for "critical thinking" can be traced back at least to the progressive theories of education promulgated by John Dewey and his circle. "Routine action," Dewey wrote in one typical observation, "may increase skill to do a *particular* thing. . . . But it does not lead to new perceptions of bearings and connections; it limits rather than widens the meaning-horizon." What a splendid example of "critical thought" in action is the phrase "meaning-horizon"! Pregnant with the adumbration of significance, it avoids the inconvenience of issuing in any particular thought.

Like so many other bad ideas, however, "critical thinking" got a tremendous boost in the 1960s and 1970s, long after Dewey had departed from the scene. It was then that the progressive ideal was radicalized and went mainstream. The result has been the educational disaster of the last several decades, when the theory that "ignorance is bliss" finally made it to prime time. We now know what should have been obvious: substitutes for knowledge are not knowledge.

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Despite its patina of depth (if we may so put it), "critical thinking" is a prescription for superficiality and sophomoric lucubration. It proffers the appearance of knowledge without the substance. Hence the necessity of scare quotes: "critical thinking" is neither genuinely critical nor genuinely thoughtful. It specializes in oppositional poses, not criticism, opaque verbal legerdemain, not thinking. Nevertheless, the ideology of "critical thinking" continues to be enormously popular. It is the hardiest of hardy perennials. Nor is this surprising. Talk about a labor-saving device! How many hours of difficult study have been circumvented by a timely dose of "critical thinking"? The savings have been incalculable.

Unfortunately, the fatuousness has been incalculable, too. Anyone wanting a vivid illustration of what a devotion to "critical thinking" really means need look no further than "More Ado (Yawn) About Great Books," an article by Emily Eakin in the April 8 issue of *The New York Times*'s section "Education Life." Miss Eakin's essay is partly an attack, partly a boast. The attack is against stodgy traditionalists who continue to believe that some books are more important than others and that a liberal arts education worthy of the name requires thoughtful acquaintance with the formative works of the Western tradition. Allan Bloom—the academic radical's favorite villain—comes in for some dismissive words as do groups like the American Council of Trustees and Alumni and the National Association of Scholars for their efforts to combat academic frivolity.

Miss Eakin's boast is more interesting. She explains that although she graduated as a literature major from a university "with world-renowned experts on Shakespeare, Milton, and the ancient Greeks," she never attended any of their classes for the simple reason that she didn't have to: "They weren't required."

> While my roommates, English majors both, slogged their way through *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*—*Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf—I was breaking new ground. I read Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin. Not that I read only theory. These were literature courses, after all. I read lots of novels, too—Thomas Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49*, Günter Grass's *Tin Drum*, and *Les Guérrillères*, a lyrical fantasy about a society without men by the French radical lesbian Monique Wittig. I met my degree requirements by taking "Feminist Literary Criticisms" and "Women and the Avant-Garde," as well as two courses devoted principally to film, and a seminar on Beckett and Nabokov. For my thesis, I wrote on novels by Marguerite Duras, Milan Kundera, and Toni Morrison, all of them published within the last 30 years. I graduated without having read for credit *The Odyssey*, *Paradise Lost*, a single play by Shakespeare, or a single novel by Jane Austen, George Eliot, or Henry James.

Miss Eakin can present what is really an indictment of her university as a boast because she believes that by devoting herself to Jacques Derrida and Monique Wittig instead of to Shakespeare and Henry James she was "breaking new ground." What she was really doing, of course, was recycling a handful of academic clichés. The young men and women who are seduced by the nonsense of "theory" are told that they are brave intellectual pioneers. Most of them actually believe it. "Literature majors," Miss Eakin explains,

> were the humanities' Green Berets, an elite corps trained on a rarefied diet of semiotics and deconstruction—the latest French imports—to expose the contradictions, inconsistencies and general sloppiness that had infected not just literature and criticism but all of Western thought since, well, Aristotle at least.

But what about the supreme sloppiness of thinking that a college student battened on nothing but trendy French imports and recent academic pulp is in a position to pass

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judgment on "Western thought since . . . Aristotle at least"? Which is worse, the arrogance of this attitude, or the ignorance that makes it possible?

The real burden of Miss Eakin's essay is to present her experience—a literature major with an ingrained contempt for literature—as normal. She may be right. But a deficiency that is normalized is still a deficiency. A watershed moment came in 1996, when (as we noted in this space at the time) Georgetown University decided that reading Chaucer, Milton, and Shakespeare would henceforth not be required of students majoring in English. Since then, many American universities have cheerfully embraced the bargain-basement intellectual radicalism that sanctions ignorance masquerading as enlightened skepticism.

Miss Eakin does not have to look very hard to find support for her position. She quotes John Guillory, for example, an English professor at New York University:

> You can conceive of a curriculum producing the same cognitive skills that doesn't use literature at all but opts for connecting with the media tastes of the day—film, video, TV, etc. It's no longer clear why we need to teach literature at all.

We hope that Professor Guillory's comments are reassuring to parents paying the $30-odd-thousand tuition bills for their children to attend NYU. Nor is Professor Guillory a freak exception. Miss Eakin also quotes Louis Menand, an English professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and a reliable dispenser of the party line for *The New York Review of Books*. Reflecting on the situation at Amherst College, where English majors have almost no required courses, Professor Menand notes that

> at Amherst, they would probably say the purpose of this degree is to develop this faculty known as critical thinking. It doesn't matter what you read as long as you're thinking critically. To graduate with a degree in English means you can think critically about almost anything. Paul de Man is in a certain sense as good as Milton.

"It doesn't matter what you read as long as you're thinking critically." Do you, Dear Reader, believe that? Unless you have been corrupted by the educational establishment, of course you don't. You know that the nihilistic theories of Paul de Man are in no sense "as good as" the works of Milton, any more than Monique Wittig's lesbian fantasies are as good as the novels of Jane Austen. But this elementary truth is beyond the ken of Emily Eakin and her like-minded peers. Referring to Professor Menand's reflections, she acknowledges that "Given how I spent my four years in college, I find this line of reasoning reassuring. I may not have read many Great Books, but I'd like to believe I acquired just as many critical thinking skills reading French theory and contemporary novels instead."

It is sad as well as ironical that a compelling demonstration that her belief is groundless is that fact that she holds it. Real critical thinking does not operate in a void. It requires the background and nourishment of substantive intellectual and moral commitments, without which it degenerates into a sterile parody. This is why, *pace* Louis Menand, it matters profoundly *what* one reads, and why, until very recently, a liberal arts education acknowledged the indissoluble link between content and criticism. Emily Eakin quotes another literature professor who observes that "putting Great Books on the syllabus does not magically produce educated and thoughtful students." Has anyone ever argued that it did? There are no magic formulae in education. The point is that by allowing students to bypass the intellectual and moral treasures represented by the Great Books for the sake of "critical thinking" is a reliable way of making sure that students will graduate being neither educated nor genuinely thoughtful.

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Raymond Aron & the power of ideas

by Roger Kimball

It is our choice of good or evil that determines our character, not our opinion about good or evil.
—Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Despotism has so often been established in the name of liberty that experience should warn us to judge parties by their practices rather than their preachings.
—Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*

Freedom of criticism in the USSR is total.
—Jean-Paul Sartre, *on returning from Russia, 1954*

Santayana's alarming thought that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" has at least as much relevance to the world of ideas as to the world of action. This is one reason that *re*-reading is just as important as reading. Time has a way of blunting the keenness of truth, muting its claim on our attention. The admonition we heeded yesterday we forget today: no emergency intervened to keep its lessons fresh. Human nature is a constant. The temptations and errors it faces do not change. But because circumstances are always shifting, truths need constantly to be restated if they are to maintain the grip, the purchase of truth. Re-reading is one of our richest sources of restatement. Putting us back in touch with what we once knew, what we still half-remember, re-reading can restore us to misplaced convictions, revitalize insights that have fallen fallow. Re-reading reminds us that nothing seems more vital than old truths rediscovered: as with friends, our intimacy is deepened by previous acquaintance.

The obstacles to re-reading are many. Sloth plays a part, of course, as does simple busyness—that curiously modern bane that mistakes movement for progress. There is also the prosaic matter of availability: how many important works are rendered *hors de combat* because they are out of print? There are libraries, yes, but books available only in libraries generally play a diminished role in the contemporary cultural conversation. Which brings me to Raymond Aron's masterpiece, *The Opium of the Intellectuals.*

I would guess that almost everyone reading this essay knows something about that book. Many will have read, or at least read in, it. First published in France in 1955, at the height of the Cold War, *L'Opium des intellectuels* was an immediate sensation. It caused something of a sensation in the United States, too, when an English translation was published in 1957. Writing in *The New York Times*, the historian Crane Brinton spoke for many when he said that the book was "a kind of running commentary on the Western world today." Aron's subject is the bewitchment—the moral and intellectual disordering—that comes with adherence to certain ideologies. Why is it, he wondered, that certain intellectuals are "merciless toward the failings of the democracies but ready to tolerate the worst crimes as long as they are

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committed in the name of the proper doctrines"? Aron's title is an inversion of Marx's contemptuous remark that religion is "the opium of the people." He quotes Simone Weil's sly reversal as an epigraph: "Marxism is undoubtedly a religion, in the lowest sense of the word. . . . [I]t has been continually used . . . as an opiate for the people." In fact—and fortunately—Weil got it only partly right. Marxism and kindred forms of thought never really became the *people's* narcotic. But they certainly became—and in essentials they still are—the drug of choice for the group that Aron anatomized: the intellectuals.

The Opium of the Intellectuals is a seminal book of the twentieth century, an indispensable contribution to that most patient and underrated of literatures, the literature of intellectual disabusement. Unaccountably the book has been out of print for many years. It is therefore welcome news indeed that Transaction Publishers has just brought out a new edition of *Opium*,[1] especially since the new edition has the added attractions of an introduction by the political philosopher Harvey C. Mansfield and, as an appendix, "Fanaticism, Prudence, and Faith," the long response to his critics that Aron published in 1956. As Professor Mansfield notes, *The Opium of the Intellectuals* was a "leading document" of the Cold War, a conflict that was conducted as much with words as with arms, but that does not mean it is primarily a book "about the past." The deformations that Aron analyzed are still very much with us, even if the figures that represent them have changed. Which is one way of saying *The Opium of the Intellectuals* is a book that profits as much by re-reading as by being read.

1 *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, by Raymond Aron, with an introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield and a foreword by Daniel J. Mahoney and Brian C. Anderson; Transaction, 358 pages, $29.95 paper. *Opium* is the sixth of Aron's works to be republished by Transaction; eventually, the editors tell us, the "Aron series" will include all of his major works.

Aron, who died in 1983 in his late seventies, is a half-forgotten colossus of twentieth-century intellectual life. Part philosopher, part sociologist, part journalist, he was above all a spokesman for that rarest form of idealism, the idealism of common sense. He was, Allan Bloom wrote shortly after Aron's death, "the man who for fifty years . . . had been right about the political alternatives actually available to us. . . . [H]e was right about Hitler, right about Stalin, and right that our Western regimes, with all their flaws, are the best and only hope of mankind." He was, Bloom concluded, "the kind of man necessary to democracy but almost impossible in it; one who both educates public opinion and is truly wise and learned." Over the course of his career, Aron occupied various exalted academic posts—at the Sorbonne, the Ecole pratique des haute études, the Collège de France—but he was never merely an academic. He wrote some forty books—on history, on the conduct of war, on the cultural and political prospects of France—and was an indefatigable political commentator, some three decades for *Figaro* and then, at the end of his life, for *L'Express*. (He also wrote for *La France Libre* during the war.)

Although showered with honors at the end of his life, Aron never enjoyed the dazzling celebrity that came the way of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and, especially, of Sartre, his classmates at the Ecole normale supérieure. In part, that was because of his intellectual style, which lacked braggadocio. He also lacked the appetite for celebrity, which is another way of saying he did not prize "brilliance" over truth. He certainly did not lack ability. By many measures, Aron was the most accomplished of his peers, in breadth as well as solidity of knowledge. He took first place at the *agrégation* in that most distinguished class, and it is a nice detail that Sartre humbly presented Aron with a copy of *Being and Nothingness* as an "ontological introduction" to Aron's earlier book on the philosophy of history.

From the 1950s through the early 1970s, Aron was regularly calumniated by the rad-

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ical Left—by his erstwhile friends Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, for starters, but also by their many epigoni and intellectual heirs. In 1963, for example, Susan Sontag dismissed Aron as "a man deranged by German philosophy belatedly converting to Anglo-Saxon empiricism and common sense under the name of 'Mediterranean' virtue." In fact, it would be difficult to find anyone at once more knowledgeable about and less "deranged" by German philosophy than Raymond Aron. His was a sober and penetrating intelligence, sufficiently curious to take on Hegel, sufficiently robust to escape uncorrupted by the encounter.

The fact that Aron was hated by the Left does not mean that he was a partisan of the Right. On the contrary, he always to some extent considered himself a man of the Left, but (in later years anyway) it was the pre-Marxist Left of high liberalism. (Bloom aptly subtitled his essay on Aron "The Last of the Liberals.") Aron's criticism of the Left was not a repudiation but an extension of his liberalism. As the sociologist Edward Shils noted in an affectionate memoir of his friend, Aron moved from being a declared socialist in his youth to becoming "the most persistent, the most severe, and the most learned critic of Marxism and of the socialist—or more precisely Communist—order of society" in the twentieth century. (Shils, like Aron, was one of a tiny number of sociologists who did honor to the name of his profession.)

Again, this shift tokened not a repudiation of youthful ideals but a maturing recognition that ideals worth cherishing are those that can be fulfilled without destroying what they profess to exalt. In this context, Shils spoke of Aron's "discriminating devotion to the ideals of the Enlightenment." The ideals in question prominently featured faith in the power of reason; Aron's discrimination showed itself in his recognition that reason's power is always limited. That is to say, if Aron was a faithful child of the Enlightenment—its secularism, its humanism, its opposition of reason to superstition—he also in many respects remained a faithful grandchild of the traditional society that many Enlightenment thinkers professed to despise. Enlightened thinking tends to be superficial thinking because its critical armory is deployed against every faith except its faith in the power of reason. Aron avoided the besetting liability of the Enlightenment by subjecting its ideals to the same scrutiny it reserved for its adversaries. "In defending the freedom of religious teaching," he wrote, "the unbeliever defends his own freedom." Aron's generosity of spirit was a coefficient of his recognition that reality was complex, knowledge limited, and action essential. Aron, Shils wrote, "very early came to know the sterile vanity of moral denunciations and lofty proclamations, of demands for perfection and of the assessment of existing situations according to the standard of perfection." As Aron himself wrote in *Opium*, "every known regime is blameworthy if one relates it to an abstract ideal of equality or liberty."

The leitmotif of Aron's career was responsibility. Not the whining metaphysical or "ontological" responsibility that Sartre was always going on about—the anguished "responsibility of the for-itself" burdened by groundless freedom—but the exercise of that prosaic, but indispensable, virtue: prudence. Aron understood that political wisdom rests in the ability to choose the better course of action even when the best course is unavailable—which is always. "The last word," he insisted, "is never said and one must not judge one's adversaries as if one's own cause were identified with absolute truth."

It is worth noting that among Aron's favorite terms of commendation were "prosaic" and its cognates, while he consistently used "poetry" and its cognates pejoratively. In his *Memoirs* (1983), Aron wrote that in *The Opium of the Intellectuals* he attempted "to bring the poetry of ideology down to the level of the prose of reality." What Aron called the "Myth of the Revolution" (like the "Myth of the Left" and the "Myth of the Proletariat") is so seductive precisely because

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of its "poetical" charm: it induces the illusion that "all things are possible," that everything—age-old institutions, the structure of society, even human nature itself—can be utterly transformed in the fiery crucible of revolutionary activity. Combined with the doctrine of historical inevitability—a monstrous idea that Marx took over from Hegel—the Myth of the Revolution is a prescription for totalitarian tyranny. What does the liquidation of the Kulaks matter in the face of the necessary unfolding of the dialectic? Like its chemical counterpart, the first effect of the opium of the intellectuals is unbounded exhilaration. Only later does the stupefaction become evident.

Unlike the revolutionary, the reformist acknowledges that genuine progress is contingent, piecemeal, and imperfect. The recalcitrance of reality—including the messy reality of human nature—guarantees that. "One is prosaic," Aron noted, "the other poetic." Equally, one is real, the other fantastical. In his *Memoirs*, Aron acknowledged that "I do in fact think that the organization of social life on this earth turns out, in the end, to be rather prosaic." (One thinks of Walter Bagehot's observation that "the essence of civilization . . . is dullness . . . an elaborate invention . . . for abolishing the fierce passions.") The subject of politics, Aristotle noted, is "the good life for man." What constitutes the good life? Aron cannily reminds us that the more extravagant answers to this question are often the most malevolent: they promise everything; they tend to deliver misery and impoverishment. Hence his rejection of Communism:

> Communism is a degraded version of the Western message. It retains its ambition to conquer nature, to improve the lot of the humble, but it sacrifices what was and must remain the heart and soul of the unending human adventure: freedom of enquiry, freedom of controversy, freedom of criticism, and the vote.

Such freedoms may seem pedestrian in comparison with the prospect of a classless society in which liberty reigns and inequality has been vanquished once and for all. But such an idea, he noted, is "no more than an illustration in a children's picture book."

To say that Aron was suspicious of the poetical is not to deny that his sober vision of human fulfillment exhibits a poetry of its own. Aron, one might say, was a poet of the realm of prose. Another way of putting this is to say that he was a champion of the real in the face of the blandishments of the ideal. The prospect of ideal—that is, total, complete—emancipation bewitches susceptible souls because "it contains in itself the poetry of the unknown, of the future, of the absolute." The problem is that the poetry of the absolute is an inhuman poetry. As Aron drily observed, in real life ideal emancipation turns out to be "indistinguishable from the omnipotence of the State."

For Aron, the issue was "not radical choice, but ambiguous compromise." He continually came back to man as he is, not as he might be imagined: "At the risk of being accused of cynicism, I refuse to believe that any social order can be based on the virtue and disinterestedness of citizens." Following Adam Smith and other classical liberals, Aron looked to the imperfections of man for the fuel to mitigate imperfection. Unlike the Marxist, the classical liberal regards men as "basically imperfect and resigns himself to a system where the good will be the result of countless actions and never the object of a conscious choice. In the last resort, he subscribes to the pessimism which sees politics as the art of creating the conditions in which the vices of men contribute to the good of the State."

Aron readily acknowledged that this prosaic model lacks the grandeur of utopia.

> Doubtless the free play of initiative, competition between buyers and sellers, would be unthinkable if human nature had not been sullied by the Fall. The individual would give of his best in the interests of others without hope of recompense, without concern for his own interests.

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But that "if" issues an unredeemable promise. Aron's twofold task was to remind us, first, that there is no human nature unsullied by the Fall and, second, to suggest, as does orthodox Christianity, that what prophets of the absolute decry as a disaster was in fact a "fortunate fall," a condition of our humanity. The utopian is optimistic about man, pessimistic about particular men and women: "I think I know man," Rousseau sadly wrote, "but as for men, I know them not." The anti-utopian is pessimistic, or at least disabused, about man; this forgiving pessimism frees him to be optimistic about individuals.

In his foreword to *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, Aron noted that he directed his argument "not so much against the Communists as against the *communisants*," against those fellow travelers for whom the West is always wrong and who believe that people can "be divided into two camps, one the incarnation of good and the other of evil, one belonging to the future and the other to the past, one standing for reason and the other for superstition." Marxism is a primary allotrope of the opium of the intellectuals because its doctrine of historical inevitability insulates it from correction by anything so trivial as factual reality. When Merleau-Ponty assures us that in the modern world the proletariat is the only form of "authentic intersubjectivity" or when he writes that Marxism "is not *a* philosophy of history, it is *the* philosophy of history, and to refuse to accept it is to blot out historical reason," no argument will wean him from his folly. What he needs is intellectual detoxification, not refutation. It is the same with Sartre, who championed totalitarian regimes from the Soviet Union to Cuba but who exhibited an implacable hatred of America and liberal democracy. ("America is a mad dog," he exclaimed in one effusion; it is "the cradle of a new Fascism.") Sartre's "Ethical radicalism," Aron wrote, "combined with ignorance of social structures, predisposed him to verbal revolutionism. Hatred of the bourgeoisie makes him allergic to prosaic reforms."

In insulating its victims from reality, the opium of the intellectuals at the same time insulates them from the rebukes of contradiction. This has allowed for some peculiar intellectual hybrids. For example, the philosophies of Nietzsche and Marx are diametrically opposed: one celebrates the lonely genius, the other the collective, one looks for a new aristocracy of *Übermenschen*, the other for the institution of the classless society. For any unintoxicated person, such differences are essential. But for intellectuals under the influence they count for naught. As Aron notes, the descendants of Marx and Nietzsche (and Hegel and Freud) come together by many paths. The existentialism of Sartre, the nihilism of Derrida or Foucault, all exhibit a similar intellectual incontinence. What unites them is not a coherent doctrine but a spirit of opposition to the established order, "the occupational disease," Aron notes, "of the intellectuals."

George Orwell famously remarked that there are some ideas so absurd that only an intellectual could believe them. *The Opium of the Intellectuals* provides a kind of Baedeker of the higher gullibility that Orwell disparaged, analyzing its attractions, describing its costs, mapping its chief roadways and pointing out some escape routes. Some readers, as Aron noted in "Fanaticism, Prudence, and Faith," criticized the book for being "negative, for abounding in refutations without providing anything constructive." An especially frequent charge was that the book celebrated "skepticism." The last half-sentence of the book—"let us pray for the advent of the skeptics"—was routinely adduced as evidence.

In fact, as Aron argued, his critics mistook him. In the first place, by lifting his concluding clause out of context, they inverted the meaning of his conclusion. "The man who no longer expects miraculous changes either from a revolution or from an economic plan," Aron wrote,

> is not obliged to resign himself to the unjustifiable. It is because he likes individual human

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> beings, participates in living communities, and respects the truth, that he refuses to surrender his soul to an abstract ideal of humanity, a tyrannical party, and an absurd scholasticism. . . . If tolerance is born of doubt, let us teach everyone to doubt all the models and utopias, to challenge all the prophets of redemption and the heralds of catastrophe.
>
> If they can abolish fanaticism, let us pray for the advent of the skeptics.

The primary target of Aron's polemic was fanaticism. But he also recognized that the defeat of fanaticism often leads to a contrary spiritual sickness, indifference. Both are expressions of the ultimate enemy, nihilism. Skepticism, Aron wrote, is useful or harmful depending on which is more to be feared at the moment: fanaticism or apathy. The intervening faculty that orients us appropriately is practical wisdom, prudence, "the god" (Aron quotes Burke) "of this lower world." In other words, skepticism for Aron is not the end but a means. "Skepticism," he wrote,

> is perhaps for the addict an indispensable phase of withdrawal; it is not, however, the cure. The addict is cured only on the day when he is capable of faith without illusion.

It is also worth noting that the skepticism Aron advocated is not a wholly negative attitude. As T. S. Eliot pointed out in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), skepticism is not necessarily destructive. On the contrary, skepticism is first of all

> the habit of examining evidence and the capacity for delayed decision. Skepticism is a highly civilized trait, though, when it declines into pyrrhonism, it is one of which civilizations can die. Where skepticism is strength, pyrrhonism is weakness: for we need not only the strength to defer a decision, but the strength to make one.

Aron would have agreed with Eliot. And he might have pointed out that critics who complained of his being insufficiently "constructive" overlooked the distinctly positive effects that simply telling the truth can have. Hegel was preeminently a constructive thinker; he was also a deeply misguided one. The demand for a "constructive program," for "positive results," etc., often turns out to be a demand for illusion and bewitchment. Aron preferred the more homely satisfactions of common reality.

Aron's indictment of intellectual intoxication is not the same thing as an indictment of intellectuals. He was not anti-intellectual or contemptuous of ideas. This was not simply because he was an intellectual himself; he clearly discerned the immense power, for good or ill, that ideas can have. "Intellectuals suffer from their inability to alter the course of events," he noted. "But they underestimate their influence. In a long term sense, politicians are the disciples of scholars or writers." In an essay called "On Capitalism and the Democratic Idea" (1973), Irving Kristol underscored this Aronian point:

> For two centuries, the very important people who managed the affairs of this society could not believe in the importance of ideas—until one day they were shocked to discover that their children, having been captured and shaped by certain ideas, were either rebelling against their authority or seceding from their society. The truth is that ideas are *all*-important. The massive and seemingly solid institutions of any society—the economic institutions, the political institutions, the religious institutions—are always at the mercy of the ideas in the heads of the people who populate these institutions. The leverage of ideas is so immense that a slight change in the intellectual climate can and will—perhaps slowly but nevertheless inexorably—twist a familiar institution into an unrecognizable shape.

It was part of Aron's purpose in *The Opium of the Intellectuals* to alert us to this sobering truth. It is sad to reflect that, nearly fifty years on, many important people in our society continue to dismiss ideas as negligible playthings.

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After my own heart: Dorothy L. Sayers's feminism

by Susan Haack

Lord, teach us to take our hearts and look them in the face, however difficult it may be.
—*Gaudy Night* (1935)

Might as well admit it: once upon a time, disinclined to mix business with pleasure, I found the very idea of the "Philosophical Novel" off-putting. It was Alison Lurie's *Imaginary Friends*, a deliciously comic exploration of cognitive dissonance and of the pitfalls of social-scientific inquiry, that changed my mind and persuaded me of the merits of mixing pleasure with business. I began to appreciate how a work of fiction may explore philosophical questions and—by means of statements which, being about fictional characters, are not true—convey philosophical truths; and I soon began to acquire a taste for (not the epistolary but) the epistemological novel.

In this genre, I have a particular admiration for Samuel Butler's reflections on the ubiquitous epistemological vices—self-deception, sham inquiry, hypocrisy—that really are *The Way of All Flesh*, and an especial fondness for Dorothy L. Sayers's *Gaudy Night*, a book I discovered only when a graduate student who had heard me give a lecture entitled "Concern for Truth: What It Means, Why It Matters" sent me a copy. She was right on the mark. For the plot of Sayers's story turns precisely on a character's concern for truth and the disastrous series of reactions it prompts, and an important preoccupation is the relation of epistemological to other values: why is honesty valuable in scientific and other inquiry? Is suppressing a fact as bad as telling a lie? What is the relation between epistemological and ethical values? Do the obligations of one's job always, or ever, override considerations of personal loyalty?

Sayers's story is set in an imaginary Oxford women's college, Shrewsbury, of which Harriet Vane, professional detective novelist and part-time sleuth, is a graduate. Miss de Vine, Shrewsbury's history don, is "a soldier knowing no personal loyalties, whose sole allegiance [is] to the fact," her devotion to the intellectual life "a powerful spiritual call." In her previous position as Provost of Flamborough College she exposed the dishonesty of a professorial candidate who, when he found an old letter that undermined his thesis, instead of ripping up his dissertation and starting again, purloined and hid the evidence. The exposure costs him his career and, as he turns to drink and falls into despair, his life. His widow, now using her maiden name of Annie Wilson, has taken a post as scout as Shrewsbury, where she expresses her rage at Miss de Vine, and her resentment of women scholars generally, in vandalism, poison-pen letters, and even attempted murder.

Significant among Annie's acts of vandalism is the destruction of the college library's copy of C. P. Snow's *The Search*. In Snow's novel (loosely based on the early work in x-ray crystallography by W. T. Astbury and his

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group at Leeds), a young man starting out in science is tempted to destroy the photograph that undermines his beautiful theory, but resists the temptation. Later, however, just as he is about to be appointed to an important post, he finds he has made a careless mistake in his work, the discovery of which costs him the position—after which he decides he doesn't really want to be a scientist after all.

To suppress a truth, avers Miss Edwards, Shrewsbury's biologist, is to publish a falsehood. The bursar wonders aloud what anyone could hope to gain by deliberate falsification, and her colleague Miss Lydgate concurs: "what satisfaction could one possibly get out of a reputation one knew one didn't deserve? It would be horrible." But Miss Hillyard notes that such dishonesty frequently happens, out of ambition, or to get the better of an argument. The dean recalls that at the end of Snow's novel another scientist deliberately falsifies a result, but the man who made the original mistake says nothing, because the culprit is hard up and has a wife and family to keep. "Of course one couldn't do that," responds Miss Barton, "not for ten wives and fifty children." And then Miss de Vine tells her story of Arthur Robinson and his dishonesty.

No less significant among Annie's acts of vandalism are the burning of Miss Barton's book on *The Position of Women in the Modern State* and the mutilation of the painstakingly corrected proofs of Miss Lydgate's book on prosody, in which the usually mild-mannered and tolerant English don has subjected Mr. Elkbottom's ridiculous theories to harsh criticism. No less significant, because they symbolize Sayers's second theme: the place of women in the life of the mind.

When Harriet, with the help of Lord Peter Wimsey, exposes her as the criminal, Annie—the desperately angry Total Woman—is defiant: "Couldn't you leave my man alone? He told a lie about someone who was dead and dust hundreds of years ago. . . . You broke him and killed him—all for nothing. Do you think that's a woman's job?" Annie thinks women should be wives and mothers; these women dons, and the women students for that matter, are unnatural creatures, taking away men's jobs.

Sayers's cast of characters enables her to look at Annie's question from just about every angle. Among the graduates, there's Mary Attwood, née Stokes, who as a student was the charming, polished center of her set, taking the lead in all those late-night discussions of love, art, and religion, but who has by now succumbed to mental stagnation: "one of those small, summery brains that flower early and run to seed"; Catherine Freemantle, who took her degree and married a farmer: "all that brilliance, all that trained intelligence, harnessed to a load that any uneducated country girl could have drawn"; and Phoebe Tucker, a former history student who now works with her archeologist husband and whose little boy has recently very carefully and correctly excavated the gardener's rubbish heap. Among the undergraduates, there's Miss Cattermole, who really wants to be a cook or a nurse, but whose parents insisted that she go to college; and Miss Layton, who, when her fiancé shows an interest in the emotionally predatory Miss Flaxman, puts him off by telling him that she's a great scholar. (Miss Layton plans, when she herself gets the First Class degree she expects and deserves, to pretend she did it by being fragile and pathetic in the viva.) And then there's Beatrice, Annie's small daughter, sketched in a half-dozen vivid lines. What does she want to do when she grows up, Harriet asks: to keep a garage, Beatrice replies. You'll never find a husband if you mess around in a garage getting dirty, her mother scolds. "I don't want [a husband]. I'd rather have a motorcycle."

Harriet herself is the most rounded and real of the characters in the book. She is nostalgic for the sheltered academic life, but having made her way in the real world (and survived the scandal of being falsely accused of the murder of her lover), she isn't entirely comfortable back in Oxford. Harriet isn't sure that Miss de Vine did the best thing,

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but she is sure that people like Annie, who make other people their jobs, are dangerous to have around. Looking *her* heart in the face, she finally acknowledges her love for Peter Wimsey, but fears that to accept the proposal of marriage he makes on special occasions—as a birthday treat, on Guy Fawkes' Day, and regularly on April Fool's Day—would be fatally to sacrifice her independence. Lord Peter, however, surprises her by acknowledging her right to run her own risks to solve the crimes: "That was an admission of equality. . . . If he conceived of marriage along those lines, then the whole problem would have to be reviewed in a new light." Twice in the course of the book Harriet rejects Peter's proposals ("No, I'm sorry." "No. I can't see my way to it."); but on the last page of the book, when he asks, "*Placetne, magistra?*," she answers: "*Placet.*"

One advantage of a novel, as of a Platonic dialogue, is that many different approaches and answers can be presented and explored; one disadvantage of a novel, as of a Platonic dialogue, is that the reader may be left unsure which approach the author takes to be best, which answers she takes to be true. Happily, however, we know how Sayers herself would reply to Annie; for besides her detective fiction, her translations of the *Chanson de Roland* and of Dante, among her wide-ranging essays (on politics, on Dr. Watson's Christian name, on the richness and flexibility of the English language) is a pair of crisp and refreshingly unorthodox papers on feminism. I say "feminism," though Sayers herself eschews the term, because by my lights she surely is a feminist; not, to be sure, a feminist of any of the now-fashionable varieties, but an old-fashioned, humanistic, individualistic feminist: a feminist, in short, after my own heart.

Since, these days, both "humanist" and "individualist" are likely to be misunderstood, I had better explain that "humanist," in this context, means "concerned with what human beings have in common *qua* human beings" and carries no connotation of aggressive atheism. (In fact, Sayers was a devout Anglican—too devout for my taste; among her works is the famous radio play of the life of Jesus, *The Man Born to Be King*, and a whole corpus of writings on theological matters.) Even more importantly, perhaps, "individualist" here means "valuing the individuality of individual human beings, respecting the differences between you and me," and carries no connotation of every-man-for-himself-ism; it has the sense rather of William James's shrewd essay "On the Value of the Individual" than of Dewey's "ragged individualism."

Sayers defends two main positive themes: that women are fully human beings, just as men are; and that, like all human beings, women are individuals, each one different. These are so closely interrelated that disentangling them is close to impossible—but probably, as this passage reveals, also undesirable:

> "What," men have distractedly asked from the beginning of time, "what on earth do women want?" I do not know that women, *as* women, want anything in particular, but as human beings they want, my good men, exactly what you want yourselves: interesting occupation, reasonable freedom for their pleasures, and a sufficient emotional outlet. What form the occupation, the pleasures, and the emotion may take, depends entirely upon the individual. You know that this is so with yourselves—why will you not believe that it is so with us?

Observing that "women are more like men than anything else on earth," Sayers stresses the needs that all human beings share: meaningful work, family, friends, someone to love. "A woman is as good as a man"—if it is not to be as meaningless as "an elephant is as good as a racehorse" (as good as a racehorse for what?)—should mean that a woman is just as much an individual human being as a man is. And *qua* individual human being, a woman should be free to do whatever work she is best at. (Like Plato, Sayers seems to assume that if each person does what he or she is best at, each job will be done by the person who

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does it best. Not so, unfortunately, but I won't pursue the point.) Probably, she thinks, there will always be fewer women mathematicians and composers than men, but what matters is that talented women can become mathematicians or composers if they choose. But what woman, it will be asked, really prefers a job to a home and family? Relatively few, Sayers believes. The unfairness is that a woman who devotes herself to her work is apt to be regarded as a freak, while a man who does the same is seen as dedicated, and—now Sayers sounds a lot like Harriet—that women should so often have to make the choice between work and family, whereas men do not.

Heterodox in her own day, apparently, and even more so in ours, Sayers deliberately plays down the idea of women as a class, category, or group. On some topics, she grants, women are likely to have special knowledge, though even there they will probably disagree among themselves; but on most questions, she insists, there is no "woman's point of view." "Are women really *not human*," she asks, "that they should be expected to toddle along all in a flock like sheep?" Yes, there is a fundamental difference between men and women, but it is not the only fundamental difference in the world. In some ways she has a lot in common with her cleaning lady, but in a discussion of art and literature she would have far more in common with Mr. Bernard Shaw. And her opinions on questions of art or literature, she continues, are just that, *her* opinions:

> I am occasionally desired by congenital imbeciles and the editors of magazines to say something about the writing of detective fiction "from the woman's point of view." To such demands, one can only say, "Go away and don't be silly. You might as well ask what is the female angle on an equilateral triangle."

Those who opposed admitting women to the universities asked rhetorically, "Why should women want to know about Aristotle?" The answer is not that all women would be the better for knowing about Aristotle, much less that they would be more companionable wives for their husbands if they did; no, "What women want as a class is irrelevant. . . . I, eccentric individual that I am, do want to know about Aristotle, and I submit that there is nothing in my shape or bodily functions that need prevent my knowing about him." Sayers might have chosen literature or logic, archeology or architecture as her example, but her choice of Aristotle has a particular poignancy, for also among her essays is "Aristotle on Detective Fiction," adapting and applying the *Poetics* to a new genre.

Sayers's angle on Aristotle is certainly not the, or even a, "woman's point of view." It is *her* angle, the point of view of a particular person with her own particular interests, her own particular projects. It puts me in mind of the disagreement I once had with Jürgen Habermas. I had argued that the idea that women bring to philosophy the special insight made possible by their oppression "neglects the most important qualities talented women have to offer philosophy: logical acumen, textual sensitivity, creative imagination, analytic rigor, conceptual subtlety and penetration, etc."; Habermas maintained, in the kindest possible way, that his women graduate students *had* brought special insights, pointing out to him that Aristotle's view of women was in some respects unenlightened. No doubt Sayers would have been quick to give the answer I wish I'd given: "Not good enough! Each serious woman scholar of Aristotle will have her own contribution to make to our understanding of his work; to expect anything less is condescension." Sayers's angle on Aristotle, I might add, is fresh and illuminating, while the supposed "woman's angle" is by now, surely, more than a little stale.

When Sayers wrote "Are Women Human?" in 1938, the battle for the admission of women to the universities was already won. (Sayers herself earned First Class honors in Medieval and Modern Languages at

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Oxford in 1915, but received her degrees only at the historic ceremony in 1920 at which the first women graduates were honored.) She would surely be pleased by the great advances women have made since then, in the life of the mind as elsewhere. But she would not be pleased to see college becoming less an opportunity for those who genuinely delight in building and stretching their intellectual muscles than an exercise in credentialism, nor to see how inhospitable today's academy can be to the genuinely independent thinker, of whatever gender. She would detest the jargon-choked, muddy blandness of contemporary academic prose. And she would surely be dismayed to find how influential the idea has become that a woman academic had better take the "woman's point of view," or else be deemed guilty of complicity in sexism.

Doubtless some will see Sayers's whole approach as passé, a holdover from the Dark Ages before Second Wave feminism; but I see it as a much needed antidote to the emphasis on women-as-a-class which predominates in feminism today. A focus on women-as-a-class was the basis of the old practices of exclusion, and those who fought to get rid of those practices had no alternative but to focus on women-as-a-class themselves. Now, however, focusing too exclusively on the category "Woman" risks playing into the hands of the oppressors. "It used to be said," Sayers observed, "that women had no *esprit de corps*; we have proved that we have—do not let us run into the opposite error of insisting that there is an aggressively feminist 'point of view' about everything."

A refusal to acknowledge women's full humanity, and a correlative inability to appreciate each woman's full individuality, really is at the very heart of sexism (and, *mutatis mutandis*, of racism). So it is disturbing that many women in the academy today, rather than being unambiguously welcomed as full participants in the life of the mind, find themselves subtly or not-so-subtly encouraged to confine themselves to the pink-collar ghetto of "women's issues" and "feminist approaches," as it is to hear the echoes of the old, sexist stereotypes in contemporary feminist philosophy: feminist ethics will focus on caring rather than duty, on virtue rather than justice; logic is a masculinist enterprise; feminist epistemology should stress connectedness, community, emotion, trust, the body, etc.

How much better it would be if, instead of casting around for an epistemology that represents "the feminist point of view," we tried, as feminists, finally to get beyond the stereotypes and, as epistemologists, to develop a true account of knowledge, evidence, warrant, inquiry, etc. Then we might be readier to acknowledge that any halfway adequate epistemology will need to be at once quasi-logical, personal, and social; concerned with the cognitive capacities and limitations that all human beings share, and with the idiosyncrasies, expertise, and imaginative contributions of individuals; looking to the way interactions among individuals may compensate for this individual's perceptual and intellectual defects, while keeping the insights only that individual could contribute.

C. S. Peirce once complained: "There is a kink in my damned brain that prevents me from thinking as other people think." But without that kink, without Peirce's intellectual left-handedness, philosophy would have been poorer by far—as feminist thinking would be the poorer without Sayers's quirky, idiosyncratic, literate intelligence. "Somebody who reads only newspapers and at best books of contemporary authors," Einstein observed, "looks to me like an extremely near-sighted person who scorns eyeglasses. He is completely dependent on the prejudices and fashions of his times, since he never gets to see or hear anything else," when at any given time "there are only a few enlightened people with a lucid mind and style and with good taste." And even fewer, I would add, so wryly witty that it's a pleasure doing business with them.

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Frantz Fanon: the platonic form of human resentment

by Anthony Daniels

While browsing in a secondhand bookshop recently, I came across an English children's story entitled *Although He Was Black*. Readers might like to complete the title for themselves: although he was black, he was clean; although he was black, he was honest; although he was black, he was clever. The last sentence of the book, however, reveals all, and reads:

> Dear old chap, he was one of the whitest fellows I ever knew—although he was black!

The dear old chap in question was Sambo, an orphaned black boy brought to England by a wealthy Englishman called Mr. Darrell who, for a reason unspecified, had spent some time in Kentucky. His two sons were expecting him to return with a parrot or a monkey as a present from such exotic climes, but he brought back Sambo instead, telling his two sons that

> "I want you each to understand that Sambo is to be kindly treated, although never allowed to take liberties; the negro is faithful to death if properly handled. You will find him most amusing, some of his ways, and also his lingo is quaintness itself. Of course, the latter will improve in time."

Actually, Sambo's lingo doesn't improve in the slightest, despite his close and lengthy association with two boys whose highest term of approbation is "Ripping!" When one of Mr. Darrell's two sons is sent to the attic as punishment for disobedience, Sambo loyally offers to take his place:

> "Might dis dirty ole nigger stop up in de attic 'stead of Massa Hugh? 'Im eat up all de bread and drink de water. Laws, dis chile lub dry bread, sometimes 'im live on it for days in de ole times, and 'pears like jes' de right fing for 'im to be up in de attic."

The book had been awarded as a prize to a child in the Beginner's Class at a Baptist Sunday school in 1944, when Frantz Fanon, the Martinican who posthumously became one of the founders and heroes of Third Worldism—the doctrine that three-quarters of the world's population is pitilessly exploited by the remaining quarter—was fighting for the Free French. (Fanon was decorated for bravery by Colonel, later General, Salan, who eventually became head of the terrorist OAS in the last days of French Algeria.) *Although He Was Black* was not the only book of its kind, then or later. My wife, who is French, remembers reading very similar books as a child in Paris in the 1950s: while across the Channel, I read stories about Billy Bunter, a very fat and rather dim pupil in a minor English public school, who repeatedly translated "*Magna est veritas et praevalebit*" as "Great is the truth and it will prevail a bit" (a profound, if unconscious, insight into the working of the world). Bunter was known as the Fat Owl

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of the Remove because, short-sighted and wearing thick round spectacles, he spent his entire life scheming to obtain and consume cream cakes. One of his classmates was Harry Jamset Ram Singh, the son of an Indian rajah who, as everyone agreed, was "a white man deep inside," a fact which satisfactorily accounted for his thoroughgoing decency and sportsmanship.

It was not altogether surprising, then, that a member of the audience for Fanon's public lecture in Lyon in the early 1950s on the parallels between black and white poetry should have sought to congratulate him on the excellence of his talk by telling him that "Basically, you're white." He could think of no higher compliment than that: but it was a compliment that had, alas, a less flattering corollary.

It is one of the virtues of David Macey's extremely long, sympathetic but not completely uncritical biography of Frantz Fanon[1] that Mr. Macey should understand the psychological significance of such an event. Fanon was himself never the serious victim of overt French racism, but as a sensitive and intelligent man he must have been profoundly wounded by the disdain and contempt in which members of his race were often held in the metropolitan countries. And in my experience, it is small slights rather than great wrongs that create the bitterest resentment: for such slights intimate that the person delivering them does not consider their recipients to be fully human.

Mr. Macey's book is exceptionally strong on Fanon's Martinican background, a background that explains some of the agonized and agonizing contortions of his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon was born on the French West Indian island in 1925, when society was racially stratified but not segregated. The children of the white elite went to school with the better-off mulattoes and blacks, where they all absorbed an idealistic republican ideology and historiography, with the idea that all men under French rule were equal and endowed with rights, thanks to the Revolution of 1789 and the efforts of Victor Schoelcher, the framer of the 1848 decree that abolished slavery in French territories. Thus Fanon grew up without much awareness of his place in the racial pecking order: he thought he was just a human being. At the same time, however, he was aware of a cultural pecking order: all things French were, by definition, superior and cultivated, and woe betide the child of an aspiring Martinican family caught speaking in Creole rather than in the language of Racine and Corneille.

Fanon's awakening was not so much rude as gradual: it occurred in stages. First came the defeat of France in 1940. The armistice left France still in control of its colonies, including Martinique, which was not only governed by a follower and local avatar of Pétain, Admiral Robert, but also became for a time the base of some of Vichy's fleet, whose sailors were stationed ashore. Not only did their presence put a strain on the fragile economy of the island, but their racist demeanor and conduct came as a shock to blacks brought up to believe in *nos ancêtres, les Gaulois*. Still, what could be expected of a pack of Pétainists and Vichyites?

The second stage in Fanon's awakening occurred when Fanon, with considerable bravery, escaped Martinique to join the Free French. He discovered that, even as he fought for France's freedom, not all Frenchmen were as equal as he had thought. True, he was considered more French than, that is to say superior to, a Senegalese or a North African, but he was not the equal of a white metropolitan Frenchman, and he had the distinct impression that black units were sent into battle first, as cannon fodder. Moreover, white metropolitans were given superior rations and accommodation. This was a discovery from which Fanon never recovered: never again was he to believe that France represented liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The third stage in Fanon's awakening oc-

1 *Frantz Fanon: A Biography*, by David Macey; Picador Press, 640 pages, $30.

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curred when, demobilized after the war, he gained a scholarship to study medicine in Lyons. Needless to say, because the scholarship was his by right—a law had been passed entitling ex-Free French servicemen to assisted places at university—he saw no reason to be grateful to France for it (an object lesson in the profoundly pernicious effect upon character of the idea of entitlement). But soon after his arrival in France there occurred an incident which he considered much more significant than his scholarship, and of which he made much in *Black Skin, White Masks.* A little girl, accompanied by her mother, sees Fanon and exclaims, "Look, a negro! Look, a negro! Look, a negro! Mum, look at the negro, I'm frightened!"

Having read and admired Sartre, Fanon was well prepared to make a theoretical mountain out of an empirical molehill. The little girl's exclamation demonstrated for him the all-pervasive nature of French racism: for if a little girl expressed fear of the black man at so tender an age, what ideas must she have absorbed from her social milieu?

These were the experiences that sensitized Fanon against French colonialism in Algeria, as previous exposure to allergens sensitize people so that they eventually suffer from anaphylactic shock when re-exposed to the allergen. Fanon went to Algeria to practice as a psychiatrist, and, though he was left-wing in his sympathies, he was merely seeking employment, not revolution, there. He was by all accounts a dedicated doctor, but when the revolt against French rule started it was inevitable that he would sympathize with and eventually adhere to it, putting his medical knowledge at its disposal. Whatever else he might have been, Fanon was definitely not a coward.

But since he has come to be known principally as a political philosopher, as a man of ideas, it is necessary to evaluate his thought independently of his psychological trajectory. Perhaps this is just as well, because the picture of the man that emerges from the 640 pages of this biography is strangely colorless and indistinct, of a man without very definite characteristics apart from his political and medical interests. Fanon manages to appear both passionate and bloodless at the same time, a kind of platonic form of human resentment, redeemed only by the code of medical ethics to which, as far as is known, he always adhered in his dealings with individual patients, even when they were French torturers. From Mr. Macey's book, we learn little of the love affair which resulted in the birth in France of an illegitimate child, abandoned without evidence of regret, or of his marriage to a white woman and of his relationship to their son: perhaps because there is very little to learn. Fanon's intense privacy was part of his colorlessness. He would have wanted to be judged by his ideas and political actions, not by his intimate life.

Mr. Macey is, in my view, far too indulgent to Fanon as a thinker. In the first place, Fanon often expressed himself badly, and in the second, he was hardly capable of sustained argument. As a theorist, he was allusive and suggestive rather than systematic: in other words, lazy. Finally, he was dishonest: more a pamphleteer in support of a cause than a seeker after truth or wisdom.

Fanon's most famous idea, of course, and the one with which he will forever be associated, is that of the healing power of violence. This does not mean that he was a sadist: there is no evidence that he enjoyed watching, hearing about, or inflicting violence. Nor was he a Nietzschean: violence was for him not an end in itself, or a sign of personal election, but a stage through which man had unfortunately to pass. Its purpose was ultimately to bring about a reign of universal milk-and-water benevolence that Nietzsche would have detested and despised. The fantastic unlikelihood of universal brotherhood being brought about by a bloodbath seemed entirely to have escaped him, however. He was so beguiled by the fact that he had had an original thought that he could not bear to give it up merely because it was wrong.

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He did not believe in the healing power of any and all violence. His attitude was a bit like that of the Peronist who, on being asked what he thought of torture, replied, "It depends who's being tortured and who's doing the torturing." Healing violence was the prerogative of the colonial oppressed who suffered not only from material exploitation, but also from an inferiority complex brought about by the deliberate inculcation of the idea that the colonialists' culture was vastly superior to their own. In killing a white man, therefore, the colonized were simultaneously ridding themselves of their material oppressors and of their inferiority complex. When the violence was over, the formerly colonized and the former colonizers would be able to relate to one another as equals. The violence would have liberated the latter as well as the former: for a superiority complex is as psychologically unhealthy as an inferiority complex. Henceforth all men would be brothers.

I trust that the shallowness of this view needs no lengthy exposition. Fanon could not face up to the indubitable though uncomfortable fact that some cultures are richer and more advanced than others. An African doesn't need to be tricked into believing that it is more comfortable to ride in a Mercedes-Benz than to walk through the bush barefoot after a herd of goats, nor does he need persuading that his culture played no part whatever in the production of the Mercedes-Benz. He knows that his own culture is inferior, at least in very many directions.

Of course, those who belong to the most advanced material culture are not necessarily superior in other ways, or even the happier for it. And likewise, it is a vulgar error to deduce individual capabilities or characteristics—one's own, or those of other people—from the capabilities or characteristics of a group or culture. The fact that I am British does not in the least mean I cannot be taught to cook or cannot appreciate good food. But it is nevertheless a part of human psychology to feel the inferiority of one's group as a personal wound. This wound cannot be healed by psychological legerdemain or by violence, any more than the CEO of Ford Motors can make his cars more desirable than BMWs by shooting the CEO of BMW. Such an act might relieve momentary frustration, but would not result in long-term advantages.

Moreover, Fanon knew from his clinical practice that violence did not bring about the effects he elsewhere said it did, either in individuals or in society as a whole. In the chapter of his most famous book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, entitled "Colonial War and Mental Disorders," he provided many startling and interesting case histories, in none of which does violence play anything other than a destructive role. For example, one young Algerian who takes part in the revolt coldbloodedly kills the wife of a known French torturer: the kind of act that Fanon elsewhere recommends as liberating. But the young man is not liberated by his deed: on the contrary, he is tormented by it, and rightly so. His torment is a sign that he retains his humanity, and all Fanon could find to say of this case is that "in our opinion time alone can bring some improvement to the disrupted personality of this young man." This is hardly evidence of the healing power of anticolonial violence.

Fanon believed, at least in theory, in the beneficial effects of indiscriminate slaughter. This followed from his statement that there were no innocent Frenchmen in Algeria, or even in France, and that therefore everyone was "a legitimate target." But when he came across the case of two Algerian boys, aged thirteen and fourteen, who killed their French playmate simply because he was French, he was clearly appalled. He believed that they should have waited until they were adults before they killed their French friends: perfidy being for adults, not children.

Fanon also knew perfectly well that the FLN was not a democratic organization and had no intention of becoming one. Like many guerrillophiles, he penned dithyrambs

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to the new, more genuine kind of democracy being forged in the crucible of slaughter, but he also knew that the FLN was almost as concerned to eliminate its internal rivals (whom it could definitively defeat) as drive out the French (whom it couldn't). The lust for power is almost always much stronger than the lust for freedom, at least for the freedom of anyone other than oneself. He knew that the FLN committed atrocities, but did not protest or publicize them: for he had, quite literally, defined truth as that which served the revolution:

> Truth is that which dislocates the colonial regime, that which promotes the emergence of the nation. Truth is that which protects the natives and destroys foreigners.

This is the kind of thing a propagandist says, but not a philosopher. Indeed, the open avowal of such an idea should be sufficient to put an alleged intellectual beyond all serious consideration. He is in effect telling the world that nothing he says can be believed: so that even if there were no internal evidence in Fanon's work of economy with the truth, it should be regarded as aesthetes used to regard pig manure before it became transgressive.

Fanon was not the first, nor the last, in the twentieth century to define truth as that which serves a cause. There were many Communists and Nazis who did so. He was not original in this, any more than he was in his guerrillophilia. He was, in effect, the Edgar Snow, Agnes Smedley, and Anna Louise Strong of the Algerian revolution rolled into one. Alas, this particular cast of mind has even yet to disappear: the outbreak of the Zapatista revolt in Chiapas, Mexico, brought it all back, like foot and mouth disease in England.

Fanon's political judgment was naïve at best. Considering he was a psychiatrist, he showed little mistrust of the honeyed words of politicians and little ability to penetrate to their real motives. The most startling example of this was his admiration for, and belief in, Ahmed Sékou Touré, the first President of Guinea. Even in the extensive menagerie of bizarre post-independence African dictators, Sékou Touré was outstanding for his combination of cruelty, megalomania, paranoia, and economic incompetence. I can best capture the quality of his rule by relating a small anecdote.

The former foreign minister of Tanzania, Oscar Kambona, who went into exile in London when he disagreed with the sainted Julius Nyerere over the matter of the one-party state—and who was repaid for his contretemps with St. Julius by the fatal defenestration of his son from an apartment in London by the Tanzanian secret service (a death still not fully investigated by the British authorities for the sake of maintaining good diplomatic relations)—told me that he was travelling one day on the London underground when he found himself next to an African of about his own age.

> "Where are you from?" asked his neighbor on the train.
>
> "Tanzania," he replied.
>
> "Ah, Tanzania," said the neighbour, throwing up his arms in admiration. "Great Nyerere! Great African leader!"
>
> Oscar asked the man where he was from.
>
> "Guinea," he replied.
>
> "Ah, Guinea," said Oscar, throwing up his arms in mock admiration. "Great Sékou Touré! Great African leader!"

The man burst into tears. I am no friend of emotional incontinence or display, but suffice it to say that I sympathize entirely with that elderly Guinean on the London underground. His emotion was real enough, as was its cause: for Sékou Touré killed or drove into exile a third of the population of his country, a feat equalled only by Macías Nguema of Equatorial Guinea (both were democratically elected, incidentally).

As for Algeria's own future, Fanon (who spoke no Arabic) was about as good a prophet as Khrushchev was about the future of the Soviet Union.

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The question remains as to why a thinker as crude and propagandistic as Fanon should have commanded so wide a following in the West. I well remember the popularity in intellectual circles of the Fanonian argument that those African countries that "liberated" themselves by force of arms, such as Angola and Mozambique, had a better prognosis than those that received their independence peacefully, more or less as a gift, because people who had fought for the independence of their country were politically aware and dedicated unselfishly to the future, had become, in short, Fanon's "New Man." Now, several million lives later, we know better.

Fanon was actually never very popular in France, despite his use of the language of Racine and Corneille: not because his bloodthirsty views were alien to the French left, but because they struck a little close to home. After all, Algeria was a humiliation for France, and the French left, unlike the British, has always been patriotic to the point of nationalism. If France was not militarily defeated, it was defeated politically, and the whole episode was a significant part of the painful contraction of Europe to the western peninsula of its own continent. Moreover, the conscience of the French left was not clear in the case of Algeria: Mitterand was a firm supporter of *Algérie française*, and the French Communist Party believed the uprising in 1954 to be a manifestation of petit bourgeois nationalism, that is to say wholly retrograde. The Algerians had more to hope for from being part of a Communist France than from ruining their country for themselves.

As if this were not sufficient, France dealt with the Algerian episode as it dealt with Vichy: that is to say, by forgetting it as soon as possible and almost pretending it never happened. Thus, although the atrocious methods used by the French forces were well-known and publicized more than forty years ago, they have been re-revealed recently in France with all the appearance of national shock. The re-revelations of French torture in Algeria are to the French what Clinton's presidential pardons were to American liberals.

Fanon was very much a figure for the 1960s: only in that decade could he have achieved his fame, which was almost entirely posthumous (he died of leukemia in 1961, aged thirty-six, shortly before the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth*). His evident hatred of Europe fitted in well with the exhibitionist self-loathing of the era: a hatred and self-loathing based largely on ignorance. When in Rome, for example, Fanon displayed no interest whatever in the monuments of that marvellous city, in case —I suspect—he were confronted with the astonishing glory of Europe as well as its degradation, a confrontation which would have required him to moderate his views. For he firmly believed that European civilization was raised on a foundation of exploitation of Africa. The ruins of Rome threatened his world view, and therefore his justification for the violence he had lauded.

In the last analysis, Fanon is more interesting as a sociological phenomenon—both for himself and for the reaction he called forth in the parts of the world he excoriated—than as a thinker. I doubt that anyone will ever again have to undertake Mr. Macey's biographical task, unless, as is unlikely, more evidence comes to light. We can only hope that the concept of laudable violence has been as comprehensively consigned to the past as the nineteenth-century medical concept of laudable pus. And Mr. Macey omits one irony that surely would have made Fanon's life a terrible torment had he lived: it was France, not Algeria, that prospered after the conclusion of the Algerian war of independence. Truly, the Owl of Minerva flies by night.

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Fresh looks at van Gogh

by Karen Wilkin

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin argued that creating, by mechanical means, multiple copies of something once prized for its singularity and its specific presence in time and space diminished the "authority" and the "authenticity" of the original, whether it was a painting, a sculpture, or the performance of a musical composition. The proliferation of anonymous replicas permitted by twentieth-century technology compromised what Benjamin called the "aura" of the work of art—which he described as "the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced." Aura "withers" when the work of art is mechanically duplicated, Benjamin warned:

> the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced.

Benjamin's essay was published in 1936. Postmodern appropriation has borne out the unfortunate accuracy of the first of his assertions; the others are simply facts of modern life, although just what he meant by "reactivate" remains unclear. As it turns out, while Benjamin should have worried about how the qualities of mechanically reproduced music would affect expectations and standards for live performance, he needn't have been concerned about loss of "aura" in the visual arts. Quite the contrary. Being introduced to a work of art through some "mechanical" medium can even enhance aura. Seeing, in the flesh, a painting or sculpture known only from reproductions remains thrilling. Slides and illustrations may provide useful preparation, but nothing can replace the intensity of real surface, real scale, real color, real context; nothing short of direct confrontation conveys a sense of the work of art as a physical object with particular material properties, made by another human being—"authenticity" and "authority" remain intact. Aura *is* diminished when scholars downgrade attributions, but that's another matter, as is the more interesting question of whether aura is, in fact, what we seek from works of art, rather than formal excellence or emotional resonance or anything else.

It could be argued, moreover, that the mass media's wide dissemination of mechanically reproduced images of works of art has had precisely the opposite effect than Benjamin predicted. Far from causing aura to wither, it has transformed some works of art from physical things with particular aesthetic qualities into another category of objects that are *all* aura. These paintings and sculptures have become instantly recogniz-

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able icons, all accumulated fame and history, "signifiers" of artistic value whose presence is eagerly sought by hordes of beholders simply because they *have* been reproduced so often. Standing in front of these well-known works takes on a significance that has nothing to do with aesthetic experience, but lies somewhere between celebrity spotting and the veneration of relics. Even if we pride ourselves on our immunity to the effects of popular reputation, it's difficult to come to terms with such sanctified works. They are hard to see, not only because of the physical barriers imposed, these days, by layers of bulletproof glass and massed tourists armed with video recorders, but also because their accumulated fame and familiarity makes it difficult to look at them the way we would at any other work of art—for their aesthetic qualities; aura prevails.

The oeuvre of that most mythologized of modernist painters, Vincent van Gogh, has been particularly vulnerable to this disagreeable transformation; people who can't recognize *The Potato Eaters* and would walk right by a picture of the corridors at Saint-Rémy can spot a *Sunflowers* from the far end of a gallery and know all about how the mad genius cut off his ear and never sold a painting. It can be argued that responsibility lies as much with novelists and movie makers as it does with mechanical reproducers, while some blame also has to be assigned to the painter himself. Van Gogh's pictures can teeter on the edge of manner; his rhythmic strokes, loaded surfaces, stylized drawing, and supercharged color make his work so readily identifiable that it's sometimes hard to get involved with what is really going on in his pictures. (His vigorous pen and ink drawings are easier to "see," despite their stylizations, not only because they have been less frequently reproduced, but also because they are so direct and intimate.) It takes special effort to approach van Gogh's paintings as paintings, and so this spring we must be grateful to the organizers of a pair of enlightening exhibitions devoted to the work of the troubled Dutch painter: "Van Gogh's 'Postman': the Portraits of Joseph Roulin," a sharply focused little gem of a show at the Museum of Modern Art from February 1 to May 15; and "Vincent van Gogh and the Painters of the Petit Boulevard,"[1] a broad, contextualizing overview at the Saint Louis Art Museum. Together and separately, they allow us to see this problematic painter freshly and oblige us to take his measure not as the popularly conceived tortured outsider, but as an informed participant in the modernist enterprise.

MOMA's small but spectacular show is, admittedly, a surefire crowd pleaser, but it is also an inspired footnote to the survey of van Gogh's portraits seen at the Philadelphia Museum last year and an illuminating examination of an important work in the Modern's collection, a confrontational 1889 image of Joseph Roulin against an elaborately patterned background. The postman, who lived with his family on the same street as van Gogh, was one of first people in Arles to agree to pose for the odd, intense, easily offended Dutchman, and one of the few to befriend him. Van Gogh began to paint his neighbor in the winter of 1888, fascinated equally, it seems, by Roulin's pug-nosed, bony face with its wide-set eyes, his luxuriant beard, his ruddy drinker's complexion, his natty uniform, and his passionately populist politics. The two men became close. (Roulin tended the painter during the notorious ear-cutting crisis.) Eventually, van Gogh painted the entire family, producing multiple versions of Madame Augustine Roulin as a paradigm of maternity—often with the couple's youngest child, born about the time Roulin père began to sit for his portrait—plus pictures of the two older

1 "Vincent van Gogh and the Painters of the Petit Boulevard" opened at the Saint Louis Museum of Art on February 17, 2001 and remains on view until May 13. The exhibition then travels to Städtisches Galerie, Frankfurt (June 8–September 2, 2001). A catalog of the exhibition, edited by Cornelia Homburg, has been published by the museum in association with Rizzoli (255 pages, $50).

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sons, aged eleven and sixteen. The curator of the exhibition, Kirk Varnedoe, suggests that, as the father of three children, the postman symbolized virility and manly responsibility to the famously alienated painter. Varnedoe sees the series of portraits of the postman as documenting a transformation from the specific to the universal, supporting the view that no matter how interested he was in a sitter's distinctive features and personality, van Gogh wished his portraits to embody enduring types rather than individuals. His comments on works in progress, in letters to his brother, Theo, make this explicit. Witness the famous description of the portrait of the solid, ample Mme. Roulin, *La Berceuse*, (1889, Boston Museum of Fine Arts), showing her against a flower-strewn background like that in MOMA's portrait of her husband, clasping the cord of a cradle; van Gogh called it an attempt

> to paint a picture in such a way that sailors, who are at once children and martyrs, seeing it in the cabin of their Icelandic fishing boat, would feel the old sense of being rocked come over them and remember their own lullabies.

Van Gogh drew Roulin, whether as symbol or as individual, three times and painted him six. The exhibition at MOMA unites two of the drawings and five of the paintings. (The others were unavailable because of fragility or the lending policy of the collection that houses them.) Seeing these intimately connected works together is a surprising and eye-testing experience that makes us consider each picture simultaneously as a unique object and as part of a dramatically varied progression. The earliest, from the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, shows Roulin seated rather stiffly at a green painted table, silhouetted against a loosely brushed blue wall. As his imposing gold-trimmed cap and brass-buttoned uniform attest, Roulin was not a mere letter carrier, but a dignified postal official. Something of the self-importance of the *petit fonctionnaire* creeps into the portrait. He displays the gold braid on his sleeves, fixing the viewer with a watchful eye; his square cut, bifurcated beard competes for attention with his gnarled and rigid hands. Whether the stiffness was due to van Gogh's efforts or to Roulin's self-consciousness about posing is debatable—he seems more relaxed, as well as more elegantly proportioned, in a related drawing. Whatever the reason, in the subsequent portraits, the painter focused on the postman's head and shoulders, gradually stylizing his features into an emblematic type. Perhaps the closest equivalent, in terms of effect and of seamlessness with the qualities of the medium, is August Sander's "typological" photographs of tradesmen.

The most naturalistic of all the head and shoulders images of Roulin belongs to the Detroit Institute of Art: a lively record of an intent gaze, a bristly beard, and an alcoholic flush of nose and cheek. The most "abstract" belongs to the Kunstmuseum, Winterthur, Switzerland: a head constructed of generalized masses, with Roulin's dark blue uniform set off by a brilliant yellow ground; its abrupt contrasts and broad planes remind us forcibly that, about the time it was painted, Paul Gauguin, champion of the eloquent simplifications to be achieved by working from memory instead of from life, was sharing the Yellow House with van Gogh.

Scholars believe that the last portraits of Roulin, which include MOMA's and the one belonging to the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, were probably done from other paintings. The postman left Arles to take a better paying position in Marseille in January 1889, and there are apparently no references to his posing before his departure, but even without this documentary evidence these pictures are so remarkably stylized, frontal, symmetrical, and, well, icon-like that they appear to be mainly about pictorial imperatives. Varnedoe suggests that we are again seeing evidence of Gauguin's helpful influence, although they are vastly less schematic than the Winterthur picture. In both the Kröller-Müller's and MOMA's paintings, a rhythm of repetitive strokes all but subsumes naturalism; Roulin's beard

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curls and writhes like the cypress trees and cloudbanks in van Gogh's Provençal landscapes of the same year. Admittedly, in the Kröller-Müller's picture, the background sprays of poppies, cornflowers, and marguerites are naturalistic enough to be justifiable as referring to wallpaper, but in MOMA's, these casual bunches of flowers become luminous disks and extravagant arabesques embedded in a complicated pattern of loops and spots; the result seems more plausibly a symbol of energy and intensity than an interpretation of anything perceived.

For an intensive seminar on the formative years of the painter's development—the crucial period he spent in Paris, before moving to the south of France—a trip to Saint Louis is required. Together with MOMA's show, it provides an opportunity to clarify our ideas and rethink our prejudices about this dreadfully overexposed painter. The Saint Louis show allows us to set our notions about van Gogh's characteristic style in a broader context, presenting us with absorbing evidence of the formation of that style, while compelling us to ponder ideas about modernism in general and about van Gogh's relation to the avant-garde in particular. If we've ever wondered how the painter of the murky, expressionist *Potato Eaters* became, in the course of a career lasting less than a decade, the painter of luminous, highly colored, highly charged portraits like those of Roulin, the exhibition provides fascinating answers.

"Vincent van Gogh and the Painters of the Petit Boulevard" is the perfect antidote to the popular conception of van Gogh as an isolated mad genius thrashing around in a state of exaltation in the south of France, making paintings that sprang from nowhere and were light-years ahead of his time. That van Gogh was difficult, was hard to get along with, and frightened people with his intensity is well documented. That he was isolated when he lived in the Brabant among the impoverished miners who inspired *The Potato Eaters* is similarly easy to prove. But when van Gogh joined his brother Theo in Paris, in 1886, he quickly became part of a group of young artists linked by overlapping circles of friendship and common aspirations. Soon after arriving, he entered the studio of Fernand Cormon, in order to improve his ability to draw, and became friendly with some of his fellow students, including Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and the precocious Emile Bernard. (It's difficult to imagine a more unlikely trio—the worldly, sophisticated, crippled aristocrat; the hypersensitive, awkward Dutchman; and the talented, eager middle-class boy—but they seem to have become friends, perhaps as much because of their common inability to conform to their families' expectations as their common compulsion to make art.) At the shop of Père Tanguy, the paint dealer and patron of the vanguard, who sometimes installed exhibitions of their work there, van Gogh got to know other young painters as "marginalized" as himself. Eventually, his circle included, along with Toulouse-Lautrec and Bernard, Paul Signac, Louis Anquetin, Georges Seurat, Charles Angrand, Lucien Pissarro, Paul Gauguin, and (because of his remarkable openness to the ideas of younger painters, such as his son, Lucien) Camille Pissarro.

The group seems to have been informal, loose, volatile, and subject to change. Rather than being made up of artists who shared a common practice, it encompassed painters with a remarkably broad range of approaches and shades of emphasis, from Signac, with his dispassionate "scientific" Neo-Impressionism, to Gauguin, with his expressive symbolism, and a good deal in between. There was apparently fierce competition to gain adherents among the proponents of each notion of what painting could be. All of these influences, along with the potent example of his much loved Japanese prints, are visible in the works van Gogh produced in Paris. Over time, long-standing friendships seem to have dissolved over questions of who had done what first or who could be called the leader of a particular group, but initially, at least, these

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passionate young painters were united by seeing themselves as modern, new, radical, alienated, and—above all—in opposition to the Impressionists, who were a generation older, and now, relatively speaking, established and successful. In other words, the painters of van Gogh's Paris circle saw themselves as an avant-garde. The phrase "painters of the Petit Boulevard," apparently coined by van Gogh, embodied that notion. It referred partly to the neighborhood where many of them lived and worked, but more specifically it signalled their difference from the older generation, the Impressionists, who had so often painted the urban life of the Grands Boulevards—the new, broad streets lined with cafés, shops, and apartment houses that were the legacy of Baron Haussmann's re-creation of Paris.

We are first introduced to the protagonists through a selection of portraits and self-portraits that are as interesting as paintings as they are as images of the cast of characters. An 1885 portrait of an excruciatingly young, tousle-haired Bernard by Toulouse-Lautrec is a charming image of a key figure in the elaborate set of cross-connections among the painters of the Petit Boulevard; at the same time, the unassuming naturalism of the picture signals how deliberate the sinuous shapes and flat patterns of Toulouse-Lautrec's later "signature" images were. We are prepared for Bernard's own progress by his broadly stroked, assured portrait of a man said to be Theo van Gogh, while Gauguin weighs in with a tentative self-portrait. Van Gogh presents himself as dapper, successful, and assured in an elegant gray hat and striped cravat, a confident self-portrait painted in 1887–88, when he had already developed his distinctive manner of staccato, radiating strokes and heightened color.

After meeting the players, we are introduced to their milieu: the working-class district of the Batignolles (the extreme outer boundary of the Impressionists' world at the beginning of their careers), the area near the Place de Clichy, and those Northern industrialized suburban reaches of the Seine—Asnières, Courbevoie, and the island of La Grande Jatte—that the Impressionists had painted as surrogate countryside for weekend holiday makers, despite the already apparent signs of change. In these equivocal zones near the city, van Gogh's generation emphasized such signs of modern life as factory chimneys and railroad bridges over what remained of nature; in Paris, they painted kiosks, and, in one of Seurat's paintings, that ultimate symbol of modernity, the still-unfinished Eiffel tower.

Van Gogh's *Factories at Asnières, Seen from the Quai de Clichy* (1887, Saint Louis Art Museum), an engaging, unpretentious picture held together by the force of color and inventive composition, sums it all up. The painting is split into big horizontal bands of green-yellow field and green-blue sky, separated by a narrow frieze of frontal buildings with brilliant red and blue roofs, and stitched together by smoking chimneys and the repetitive pickets of a fence. Perhaps most striking is the variety of painting languages van Gogh employs, as though he were trying all the possibilities suggested by his friends at once: loose, impressionistic gestures in the sky, rhythmic strokes of divided color in the field, and expediently direct touches in between. The biggest surprise of this section is Bernard's *Iron Bridge at Asnières* (1887, Museum of Modern Art, New York), a paean to the railroad and to the beneficial advice of Gauguin. Bernard didn't need the fussy, silhouetted black figures walking along the embankment, but otherwise the nineteen-year-old painter acquitted himself brilliantly, fearlessly deploying the bold flat planes of the bridge piers and riverbank, and orchestrating a rich assortment of pinks, rose-grays, and mauves against the celadon green of the Seine, an acid yellow boat, and a flourish of green grass. Gauguin's influence is evident in Bernard's touch, in his aggressive simplifications, and possibly in his lush palette, but the picture is full of energy and promise. A little Anquetin "portrait" of a kiosk on the Boulevard des Batignolles, bathed in rosy light, is another highlight.

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Other sections deal with the various responses of van Gogh and his circle to such themes as landscape, portraiture, and "Entertainment and Nightlife." Here, Toulouse-Lautrec is the obvious leader, a connoisseur of Parisian low-life who introduced van Gogh and Bernard to its attractions. Unlike the Impressionists, who concentrated on images of spectacle and spectators, the younger artists seem to have been most engaged by the general atmosphere of Paris at night, its crowds and louche encounters. The exception is Seurat, represented by the Albright-Knox's delicious *Study for "Le Chahut"* (1889), with its musicians and high-kicking dancers conjured up out of a haze of red, cream, and blue, but relegated to the world of artifice by a spotted and dotted dark-blue frame. Toulouse-Lautrec offers incisively drawn, rapidly stroked paintings of negotiations between tourists and available women, while the teenage Bernard demonstrates his debt to his friend's speedy, sketchy style in *The Hour of the Flesh* (1885–86, private collection), a big, evocative pink and green pastel of pairings-off, so uncannily atmospheric and scrupulously observed that we begin to wonder if Bernard's parents knew where their young son was at night.

Throughout, the evidence is marshalled thoughtfully, setting related pictures side by side—everything from internationally celebrated works to obscure or seldom seen ones—all chosen to reveal the connections and divergences among the painters of the Petit Boulevard at different points in their tenuous association. Van Gogh's acclaimed *La Berceuse*, from Boston, for example, is paired with Gauguin's less known portrait of Mme. Roulin, from the Saint Louis Art Museum's collection. Painted in Arles, they bear witness to a dialogue begun in Paris and continued in the south, even though Gauguin's acceptance of van Gogh's invitation to join him at the Yellow House seems to have been prompted by economic need rather than affection. Tellingly, van Gogh centers Mme. Roulin against an otherworldly background of stylized flowers, turning her into a kind of lumpen madonna; Gauguin's Augustine Roulin is feminine and appealing, if slightly bovine, but the painter shoves her off to one side, against one of his own pictures (also in the show). Gauguin's painting of the postman's wife makes palpable his interest in Cézanne—apparently not shared by van Gogh—as does his portrait of Bernard's sister, Madeleine, which is paired with one by Bernard himself. The older painter's influence on the younger is evident in the similarities of a "Cézannian" touch and an economical rendering of form in both paintings, but Gauguin (who apparently tried to seduce Madeleine) presents us with a flirtatious, poised, slender-waisted young woman, while her brother makes her a bodiless, introspective innocent.

In addition to the obvious pleasures of such a well-chosen group of often unexpected works, the show gives us a new sense of each artist as an individual, a sharpened awareness of van Gogh's place in the Parisian vanguard, and a more acute understanding of the complexities of the modernist enterprise in late nineteenth-century France—complexities that make the rather clumsy academic coinage "modernisms" more and more necessary, as we realize just how many alternative ideas of the new were current at any given time. The handsome, copiously illustrated catalogue that accompanies the show develops similar themes. Collectively, the essays by the show's curator, Cornelia Homburg, and her colleagues amount to a definitive discussion of van Gogh in relation to the avant-garde, and by extension, become a provocative examination of the notion of the avant-garde itself, particularly in Paris, in the last decades of the nineteenth century. We might wish that all of the essays were as free of predictable attitudes and jargon, as full of insightful observations as Homburg's, but the catalogue is nonetheless a valuable, informative document—the next best thing to a trip to Saint Louis.

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Poems *by F. D. Reeve, Daniel Rifenburgh, Daniel Corrie & William Logan*

Wild life (on a cat killed by a pit bull)

The meadow shimmers in the October sun,
on warm blue asters, like stars fallen from the gravid sky;
by noon the earth, an impatient hunter,
fires the wind, blacking the trees, searing the fallow.
What can man make with stumps and scorched forms,
the ridicule of old age, unredeemable failure?

Every false move leads into deeper failure;
history becomes a dictionary of dead forms,
burned faces on harvested fields lying fallow
waiting for evil to plow the good under. Then the last hunter
goes cold like the moon, and the silken skirt of the sky
falls, and wild dogs shred the terrified sun.

—F. D. Reeve

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Voice

for Richard Wilbur

Today I am proud of all poets everywhere,
For it's true: the voice is sacred,
Such is this mix of meaning, muscle, and air.

Though they toil in private, as at solitaire,
And often wilt among the living and thrive among the dead,
Today I am proud of all poets everywhere

For they loose the stops, and what issues there
Is like a dance upon an isthmus between two seabeds,
Such is this mix of meaning, muscle, and air,

And they are its outlets, the vivid portals in air
Through which the winds of all revelations are sped,
So that today I am proud of all poets everywhere.

Some god, in his hunger to be known, pared
His desire into a pipe of flesh, and through
    it like a living thread
Goes this mix of meaning, muscle, and air.

O Voice, rising in rage, or lifted in prayer,
Or falling silent, in despair of all that cannot be said,
Today I am proud of all poets everywhere,
Such is this mix of meaning, muscle, and air.

—*Daniel Rifenburgh*

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For John Haines

Harsh incantation of Alaskan wind.
Let your eyes close, then read the book of snow.
The vast wing opens, shifting in its hues.
Aurora tilts its wings and turns its page.

A wolf's eyes gleam to mirrors of fresh tracks.
The young pack plays at rushing the lone moose.
Their bright fangs learn the lessons of bright blood.
The hunting, hunted tracks imprint snow's page.

Once seen, the crystal branch begins to see.
A human gaze will lift toward that height.
The cedar stiffly sways in robes of ice.
The human and inhuman gaze will meet.

Let your eyes close, then dream the poem again.
See Goya's brush sweep through aurora's night.
See David's marbled shoulders rise from ice.
A lonely cabin holds the book of sleep.

—Daniel Corrie

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The Devil's toenail

a seashell

What might enshrine
geology's raw nerve
or a French curve
spiralling through the line

edging this broken shape,
this porous, paid-for lime,
endowed the rugged climb
down the stone landscape

into a present marked
by sediment's raw fear,
laid down year by year,
each grain a miniature ark.

Curved as a coracle,
the fossil shell stood out
amid the gravel rout
like the bone of an oracle,

waiting for the words
to make the future sense
as Romans at some expense
did from the livers of birds.

Do two lovers owe
the strangers they were at the start
more than their faltering hearts?
The past would say no.

—*William Logan*

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Letter from South Africa

The tyranny of anti-racism

by Sarah Ruden

Squinting through the hype surrounding the new South Africa, I reckon that the country is in the middle, farcical stages of authoritarianism. On Freedom Day, Women's Day, Heritage Day, and so on, heroes of the revolution pop out of limousines and luxury planes to dispense social uplift-ment through speeches to the "previously disadvantaged." After the straggly rallies, the government media either represent them as heady fests or convey scoldings for indifference to the creation of a better life for all.

Even most blacks have firmly re-designated every new holiday Going to the Beach Day, and their decision seems sound. The absurd evil of apartheid could be summed up in the prohibition of the majority of South Africans from the abundant and beautiful beaches; the freedom for all races to play in the sand together signals the blessings of the post-apartheid era. I began this article on March 21, Human Rights Day, and I could hear multilingual yells from children on the beach a few feet from my study.

But strangely enough, the present regime does not want blacks to go to the beach either. It wants them to assemble to hear about the glorious future, though this is a future they are increasingly skeptical about—and, again, they do not appear unreasoning. In spite of being able to go where they want, they are having trouble getting there, because they are poorer, sicker, and in more danger than ever before. The sad part of living near the beach is seeing skinny, poorly dressed black visitors hiking slowly in from the highway in the morning.

People of all races who want to do something about the future would rather pray than sit in the hot sun listening to politicians they believe do not care. This Human Rights Day saw a peppy multidenominational, multiracial religious service with 50,000 attendees. The Minister of Education, speaking at a much smaller gathering elsewhere, condemned the service as "divisive."

South African leaders have been experimenting for some time with such surreal language, which if accepted would make experience and common sense unspeakable, and so let the regime do whatever it wants. Established meaninglessness is necessary for those wanting to control the last country in Africa with the potential for a full and public intellectual life. The economy is international and fairly diversified, with good infrastructure, particularly in communications. Educated people want to stay and raise children and indigenous plants. Independent courts take constitutional promises seriously. In short, the sort of arrogant one-party state that stalks around perpetuating civil wars in order to vacuum up its neighbors' gold, diamonds, and oil can arise here—and burgeoning arms purchases testify that this *is* planned—only if the strong civil society shuts up. The government is

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therefore hoping to stave off frank criticism by means of political correctness.

Mainstream America sees political correctness chiefly as an aesthetic irritant (college students prevented from reading Shakespeare, a grim hyper-politeness settling over public discourse that is going to happen anyway). I suspect that in America the problem is more than just a good subject for internet jokes, but I am certain that in South Africa political correctness is a starving monster.

The open predations on freedom of speech in South African are not my most insomniac concern. After a road accident, policemen on the scene identified a journalist as such, beat him savagely, arrested him, threw him into a cell overnight, and refused him medical attention; he lost an eye. The Human Rights Commission issued subpoenas to white news editors (many of whom had sacrificed to oppose apartheid) for "racism"—a collection of crimes that included not identifying by name all the corpses in a photo of the aftermath of an African massacre. Officials regularly insult and threaten journalists for reporting on corruption. The Minister of Safety and Security is withholding crime statistics, and various departments are working in apparent coordination on plans to ban reporters from government property and from conversations with government employees unless by written ministerial consent. A draft law would give parliament the power to conduct trials for "false or misleading" statements about its own procedures and to hand out jail terms of up to three years. Now that the bravest journalists are exploring a network of multimillion-dollar bribes woven tightly around the president, they get anonymous death threats.

Disturbing as all of this is, it may not be the worst. You can at least easily see what is happening. The insidious and so far neglected problem is that journalists accept more and more the limits subtly but authoritatively set for inquiry and criticism. No, worse: small-circulation investigative publications like the *Mail & Guardian* and *noseweek* show by contrast the descent of most news media into lickspittle. On March 23, the *Mail & Guardian* broke one if its typical stories of corruption. The CEO of the South African National Tuberculosis Association, a black man, had been shown by an audit to have enjoyed, in return for two days' work a month, a salary and benefits package fit for the ambassador to Paris. ("Previous Santa CEOs had been either unpaid volunteers or were paid a token allowance.") He duplicated his official petrol card, probably to share it with relatives, bought hundreds of dollars worth of liquor on his official credit card in a single week, and frequently took his whole family out to lavish restaurants at donors' expense.

On South African Broadcasting Company television news a few days later, the trouble was alleged to be the lack of "transformation" (i.e., packing with unqualified blacks) in the organization: the governing board was, damagingly, still all white. The CEO, who would not talk to the *Mail & Guardian*, told the SABC—ta da!—that race was the source of tension and misunderstanding and that "his" credit card had been investigated without his permission. Ordinary news consumers could not have deduced any specific accusations against him.

This story could be a template for what news reporting is becoming. Even in reading daily newspapers and watching the new channel, e tv, which is free from government control, I tick off jargon as often as I imbibe something recognizable as news. The simplicity of anti-racism is swallowing entire topics and therewith entire domains of public policy.

Take education—please. Having lectured at a South African university myself, I chuckled in horror when I heard of the new plan for higher education. Institutions will be funded according to the "put-through" rate rather than the number of students. This will inevitably break all remaining resistance to the already astounding grade inflation. (One of my students passed, more or less by departmental conspiracy, after he

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had admittedly not obtained or consulted the textbook or attended a single lecture.) The Department of Education could not have arrived at their agendum had they looked at empirical phenomena in education, themselves the result of distorted racial ideology: post-apartheid public high schools have been sent legions of semi-literate black "teachers" who are frequently drunk, absent, or violent, the men tending to keep harems of schoolgirls as well. Skewed exit exams and deep-diving affirmative action present radically ignorant black youth to universities for a bewildered, cowed liberal faculty to cope with. But the government is obsessed with rhetoric about the "historically disadvantaged [black] institutions [of apartheid]." This means, with the media's complaisance, *not* talking about the integration that now exists.

Or take agriculture. The Extension of Security of Tenure Act imposes feudalism on modern, mechanized farms. Unneeded but unevictable former workers and their families steal everything that isn't nailed down (they would starve otherwise), and the angrier and more restless among them kill hundreds of farmers with AK-47s left over from the struggle against apartheid. The government could more usefully have settled a heavily armed refugee population in the aisles of grocery stores and told managers to relax and get on with their work. But in the media I have seen and heard only praise of the act and only disgust for the "racist" farmers who harass, torture, and kill blacks to get them off the property.

Here's something lighter. Sports stories are regularly about the "transformation" of national sports teams, but it would be inconceivable—even for the cowboys at *noseweek*—to run a story about what "transformation" has done to competitiveness. After decades of sports isolation through anti-apartheid sanctions, South Africans celebrated—I hid indoors, but the street parties were harmless, just very loud—the still untransformed national team's victory in the 1995 Rugby World Cup. But, ah, *now*. . . Rugby fans know how they feel about "transformation." Still either they don't say it publicly, mollified and a little shamed by stories about special training programs for black children, or their words of discontent go unrecorded. The formula comes from on high with the force and simplicity of a biblical commandment. Nothing is more interesting than race. Nothing but racial prejudice or disadvantage can explain evil or failure. If facts and feelings do not jive with this, then suppress them.

To the extent that contradictions cannot be completely hidden, a "balanced view" is "brought" to reporting the way a wrecking ball is brought to a building. Some editors are not even above fomenting scandal about whites, on an innovative principle of affirmative action: as much dirt should come out about whites as about blacks, regardless of how much dirt there actually is. Aided by editors at *The Star* nervous about recent negative reporting on black officials in the *Mail & Guardian*, black politicians smeared white Helena Dolny, head of the Land Bank. A veteran anti-apartheid activist, expert on rural economics, and widow of the revered Communist Joe Slovo, she had opened the Land Bank fairly and efficiently to farmers of all colors. After she was cleared of baseless charges of corruption and—of course—racism, she found that vindication did not matter and had to quit.

Many people will think it silly for me to call political correctness in South Africa totalitarian, but some of its characteristics have analogs in fascist and Communist propaganda. One commonality is that the language is unmeaning and undefeatable at the same time, so integrated is it into an absurd system—in this case a system of public administration that has experienced such radical affirmative action and so many outright raids on common property by the already rich ("black business empowerment") that it bears the same resemblance to a constitutional democracy that a mafia made up of teenagers bears to the United States Senate. The system, like Communism

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and fascism, destroys wealth and disperses energy, so that it is forced to expand, to move further and further onto what has been private and productive and loot its fuel from there.

It is not the truth or falseness of the language that is important, but its inflexibility, its inability to serve thought. White South Africa is still deplorably racist. (My neighbor will not allow his maid to use the family toilet. What irks me even more is the employment of blacks as human bungee cords to hold furniture and building materials onto moving vehicles.) But then most of us would also agree with Stalin that idleness is bad and with Pol Pot that rural life is wholesome. Truisms have to be *developed* in a particular way. The viciousness of words like "bourgeois" or "racism" comes from the fear they generate, which keeps them static as part of an unassailable system. Helena Dolny could not answer the charges of racism by saying in public what every grown-up in South African knows: black officials in their glossy new office suites do not know their heads from a hole in the ground and are interested mainly in personal payback for apartheid. They consider any competent and honest person a threat. Dolny could not defend herself, because she could not name the politics behind her persecution; if she had named them, the press would have made her a "racist" non-person.

Ironically, you cannot in these circumstances even explore classic white-on-black racism, because, like every other phenomenon, it is complex and changing and was not created to bail out self-serving assumptions. This entire fascinating country has no public fora for analysis. No magazine like *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic Monthly* carries long, in-depth stories about why things are the way they are, stories that dismiss wishful thinking in a way mere reporting cannot.

I can see where the timidity of the majority of South African journalists comes from. The truth in Africa is a big ouch. The fantasy of the equal adaptiveness of African culture leading inevitably to post-colonial triumph, in defiance of the West, is as big a lie as ever clowned on the world stage, but what is a plausible vision of the future if not re-colonization or devastation? I cannot honestly say, for example, that I believe any amount of straight talk or even sanctions will prevent South Africa from supporting Zimbabwean anarchy or even imitating it by continuing to tolerate land invasions in its own province of KwaZulu-Natal. But I want to suggest that journalists could talk to and about Africa better if they actually said what they thought. Then, they might hear in return not a more manipulative version of their own cant bouncing back from fat-cats, but the truth about what ordinary Africans want and need.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

Tate Modern: inside & out
by Hilton Kramer & Francis Morrone
Søren Kierkegaard *by Roger Kimball*
Aboriginal history *by Keith Windschuttle*
Vermeer in Delft *by Karen Wilkin*
William Empson's poetry *by Paul Dean*
Human cloning *by Jenny Teichman*

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Theater

The ghosts of the ghosts of Broadway past

by Mark Steyn

An elderly man walks slowly down the aisle of a dark decayed theater. The beams of his flashlight bounce jaggedly from crumbling cornices, and the shadows they cast are of ghosts. Ghosts of glamorous stars, beautiful chorines, beguiling songs, glittering romance, the ghosts of this and all Broadway theaters. Even the man with the flashlight is a ghost: a once powerful impresario, long retired, but stepping up on stage for one last celebration of the past—an evening in which, as he puts it, we can glamorize the old days, stumble through a song or two, and lie about ourselves.

Thus begins the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of *Follies* at the Belasco—the stylish prologue of the latest attempt to dodge the show's indestructible paradox: song for song, it's a glorious summation of Broadway's illustrious past; yet, as a whole, it denies the possibility of any kind of future. For its original producer and director, Harold Prince, *Follies* started with an image, a famous photograph by Eliot Elisofon of Gloria Swanson standing in the ruins of the Roxy Theater. The Roxy opened in 1928 with *The Loves of Sunya*, and, when it was torn down in 1960, some sly flack thought it would be a neat idea to bring Swanson back. In 1971, that was what Prince wanted *Follies* to be about: "rubble in the daylight." The show is set in the Weismann Theatre, now scheduled for demolition but once the home of Dimitri Weismann's spectacular Broadway revues.

Of course, Prince and his writers, Stephen Sondheim (music and lyrics) and James Goldman (book), were not the sort of unambitious slackers content to examine merely the rubble of the theater. The rubble on display in *Follies* was also the Vietnam-era rubble of American optimism, of conventional virtues, of middle-class lives and the lies required to sustain them. Heigh-ho. Thirty years on, if American optimism is presently at a low ebb, it's less to do with Vietnam-derived self-doubt than our dot-com stocks going south; the hypocrisies of conventional morality have been replaced by a whole new set of lies we tell ourselves, about self-esteem and self-expression and the other supposedly liberating virtues of the age; and *Follies*'s story of a doomed theater seems not metaphorical but prosaically literal. Its new home in the Belasco only rubs it in: the most effective piece of set-building in the production is really nothing to do with the designer, Mark Thompson. In the Seventies, the theater's lower boxes on either wing of the stage were ripped out to accommodate the needs of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, the vandalism subsequently hidden by heavy drapes. For *Follies*, the curtains have been removed, and the ugly scars of these brute amputations are in full view. It is a useful reminder that, for all the indifference of the age, the theater's greatest wounds in these last three decades have been self-inflicted.

To be sure, *Follies*'s authors could not

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have predicted either how totally both Broadway and the American musical would collapse, or any of the show's other consequences, some of which read like a legit variant of chaos theory. During the production's tryout in Boston, Prince and Sondheim read a review by a young Harvard student and were so impressed they asked him to lunch. He was a Broadway buff and wanted to write for the theater. They were encouraging. But the theme of his essay was that *Follies* represented the death of the musical, so, taking himself at his word, he went into newspapers instead. His name was Frank Rich, and his long championing of Sondheim through the Eighties would seem to fly in the face of that earliest and shrewdest judgment. Rich was the last important *New York Times* theater critic, if only because you can't have an important theater critic without an important theater.

As for *Follies* itself, across the decades the show became an extreme victim of the condition it purports to dissect: by the time of the 1985 gala concerts at Lincoln Center with Carol Burnett, Elaine Stritch, Barbara Cook, Lee Remick, Phyllis Newman, et al., the savage indictment of nostalgia had become just another exercise in it—indestructible old broads being given standing ovations merely for standing. Sondheim wrote their entrance music, "Beautiful Girls," as a knowing pastiche of Irving Berlin's innocent original, "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody," the anthem of the real *Ziegfeld Follies*. But time blurs the distinction and nostalgia is Broadway's reflex disposition: if there's nothing else to be nostalgic about, might as well be nostalgic about an attack on nostalgia. *Follies*, my fellow critic Martin Gottfried noted a few years back, was now "the Judy Garland of musicals." In 1987, Cameron Mackintosh produced a splashy revival in the West End. In private, Sondheim referred to it as *Hello, Follies!* Jerry Herman, composer of *Hello, Dolly!*, *Mame*, and *La Cage Aux Folles*—purveyor of corny foursquare showtunes for the bridge-&-tunnel crowd delivered by big ladies of a certain age on staircases—once stood in pointless counterpoint to Sondheim. But Sondheim wound up with the ultimate "big lady" show: these days, at least for show folk, *Follies*'s big ladies and big staircase out-Herman Jerry.

In its dramatis personae and its brittle cocktail conversation, *Follies*, like its predecessor *Company*, can seem like a particularly unpleasant Manhattan dinner party. But its setting—the stage—gives it a strange ambivalence. Is it a revue? Or a book show? Yes on both counts. Its characters are riddled with self-loathing, but the show asks us to love them, anyway, as we once loved Mary Martin in *South Pacific* or Ethel Merman in *Anything Goes*. That's quite a demand. Goldman's book focuses on a couple of couples, two old showgirls and their husbands, Phyllis and Ben and Sally and Buddy. Ben's a wealthy, connected man about Manhattan, Buddy's a couple of socio-economic notches lower, an oil-rig salesmen. But these class distinctions make little difference: as a quartet, they exude wholly negative vibes—they despise their spouses, they despise their lives, they despise themselves. You can't blame the audience for being inclined to take them at their own measure. The songs they sing are cheerless propositions. "Could I Leave You?," muses Phyllis, cataloguing her husband's flaws and winding up with one of the nastiest endings in the Broadway repertoire: "Will I leave you?/ Guess!"

Unmistakably Sondheim. Adding to the general gloom, the unlovely foursome is shadowed—or, in this production, stalked—by the ghosts of their younger selves, before they got jaded, resigned, despairing, etc. The good news is that they're also surrounded by various supporting players—the stars of the *Follies*—old troupers, hokey double-acts, aging operetta divas, all of whom get a song apiece, each a delicious and finely targeted pastiche. Over the years, these surrounding cameos have become the show's main pleasure, an opportunity for the kind of stunt casting that, in small roles, audiences love: in the original, it was Fifi D'Orsay and Yvonne De Carlo; in the all-star concert, the double act was Comden and

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Green, Broadway bluechips, authors of *On the Town* and *Singin' in the Rain*; in London, Eartha Kitt showed up to purr her way through "I'm Still Here." For this production, the artful exhumations are especially rewarding: Joan Roberts, the original Laurey in *Oklahoma!* six decades ago, appears as a Mitteleuropan operetta star; the game old song'n'dance team are Donald Saddler, veteran of *High Button Shoes*, choreographer of *Wonderful Town* and much else, and Marge Champion, once married to Gower Champion, director of *Hello, Dolly!* and *42nd Street*; Betty Garrett, who was Frank Sinatra's lippy sweetheart in *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* and *On the Town*, delivers "Broadway Baby"; and Polly Bergen, a tough but forgotten film name playing a tough but forgotten film name, gets the show's guaranteed stopper, "I'm Still Here."

Sondheim's songs for these characters are a one-man recapitulation of the history of American theater music, stretching back a century to Victor Herbert and that operetta staple, the "kiss" waltz. Herbert's was "Kiss Me Again," Sondheim's is the slightest reordering, "One More Kiss," though its reasoning is somewhat more pointed: one more kiss because "all things beautiful must die."

Follies has another nod to Herbert, this time to his 1903 hit *Babes in Toyland*, one of a slew of turn-of-the-century *Wizard of Oz* derivatives set in mythical, magical never-never lands. In *Follies*'s second-act fantasy sequence, Sondheim turns Toyland into Loveland and its babes into middle-aged couples, though their approach to love remains fundamentally immature:

> Bells ring, fountains splash
> Folks use kisses 'stead of cash
> In Loveland, Loveland.

And, for irrepressible optimism, nothing tops "You're Gonna Love Tomorrow," in which Sondheim condenses the Ira Gershwin school of erudite innocence into one deft couplet: "Say toodle-oo to sorrow/ And fare thee well, ennui."

The adroitness of pastiche in *Follies* is amazing. Not just Berlin and Porter but lesser known names like DeSylva, Brown and Henderson, Yip Harburg, and Burton Lane. Indeed, Sondheim knows his predecessors so well he's even able to indulge in the parodist's equivalent of rubbing your head while patting your stomach. "Losing My Mind" was apparently intended as a George Gershwin tune (along the lines of "But Not For Me") with a Dorothy Fields lyric—a droll conceit since Gershwin and Fields never actually wrote together. Sondheim was striving for the romantic directness Miss Fields pulls off in "I'm in the Mood for Love" or "Don't Blame Me" or a dozen others. But the same affecting simplicity eludes him, and some of the images jar:

> The sun comes up
> I think about you
> The coffee cup
> I think about you.

The coffee cup? In a way, it's right. You can picture it: a lonely woman in a dressing gown, the breakfast table, the day's first cup of coffee. But, as correct as it is descriptively, it's wrong emotionally. It's an external image, too self-aware, to the point where its chief value seems to be that it rhymes with "up," and there aren't a lot of alternatives: "I feed my pup"? "I need a tup"? Too Shakespearean. Not for the first time, you're aware that a Sondheim love song seems to be analyzing love rather than expressing it. By the time he wrote "Country House" for the London revival, Sondheim seemed to be adding a pastiche of his own mid-period style to the show's other targets, thereby completing *Follies*'s useful function as an all-in-one compilation album of Broadway history.

The score is the reason why a flop show of 1971 still fascinates thirty years later. James Goldman's book by contrast wafts across the footlights like a cracked septic tank. "It's my life and I've lived it wrong," says Ben. "You haven't got a clue what love

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is. I should have left you years ago," Phyllis tells him.

For this first-ever Broadway revival, the Roundabout has engaged the British director Matthew Warchus, best known for small-scale plays like Yasmin Reza's *Art*. The thinking here is that, as innumerable other British play directors—Trevor Nunn, Nicholas Hytner, Sam Mendes, etc.—have successfully re-examined big Broadway musicals, why shouldn't Warchus be able to? Needless to say, the new kid on the block is taking the same approach as his compatriots: he's bringing out the "dark side" of the show. But bringing out the dark side of *Carousel*, *My Fair Lady*, *Cabaret*, and (God help us) *Oliver!* is one thing. Bringing out the dark side of *Follies* is like bringing out the dark side of a coal cellar. I suspect the late Mike Ockrent, who directed Mackintosh's revival, was supposed to bring out the dark side, but, by the standards of moody black-garbed London theater directors, he was a jolly sort and cheerfulness kept breaking in. So, fourteen years on, this revival took no chances: in a show beloved for its score and staging (the original choreographer was Michael Bennett), Warchus announced that his production would be "book-centered" and "actor-centered," perversely determined to make a virtue of the show's defects.

If only he could. For his principals, Warchus has cast actors rather than singers, in order to give the characters more depth and shade. In opera, even the most egomaniacal director wouldn't suggest casting, say, Judi Dench in Verdi in order to get a tougher dramatic edge. But the musical, a weird amalgam of naturalism and convention, invites such distortions. Warchus gives us Gregory Harrison as Ben, Treat Williams as Buddy, Blythe Danner as Phyllis and Judith Ivey as Sally, all respected players. His approach pays off in some very, very small ways. Phyllis, icily bitter, is the nearest thing to a rounded character, but that's not saying much and Blythe Danner—best known these days as Gwyneth Paltrow's mom—performs a useful service in putting enough of a spin on Goldman's clunkier zingers to suggest a woman faintly recoiling from her own chilly wit. Line for line, I don't think anyone's got more out of this part. But her three cohorts are desperate: they're good enough actors to wish they had decent material, but not good enough to hide its absence. Putting a heavyweight player in a featherweight part is like getting Callas to sing "A-wop-bop-a-loo-bop": all you notice is the discomfort. Compare Reba McEntire's healthy indifference to Peter Stone's lame book at *Annie Get Your Gun*, and you appreciate the problems so-called "good actors" brings. At *Follies*, all four principals have the haunted look of Bertie Wooster giving a speech at the village hall. Miss Ivey gets through the evening by patronizing her character to a grotesque degree. With the qualified exception of Miss Danner, Warchus's revival fails utterly even in its own misguided goals.

When the band strikes up, something even more extraordinary happens. Instead of being a welcome respite from the book's bitching and whining, the songs seem like a ham-fisted karaoke turn. Insofar as there are any characters at all, they're in the emotional depths of their songs. Yet none of Warchus's principals have the vocal power to wring the full juice from their numbers. Both men are dull, Miss Ivey lacks the range or phrasing for "Losing My Mind," and Miss Danner's dancing in "The Ballad of Lucy and Jessie" is plonkingly earthbound. Even the band sounds wrong. Warchus has evidently been influenced by Sam Mendes's much admired (not by me) production of *Cabaret*. But it's one thing to have a pared-down rinky-dink ensemble for a Berlin nightclub, quite another when you're trying to conjure not just the sound of Broadway's past but the way it plays in our memory, always larger, always fuller, always perfect. In reducing his orchestra from the original twenty-six musicians to fourteen, Warchus seems to have missed the point. *Follies* is about the siren song of nostalgia and the orchestral lushness plays an important part in establishing that

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—a part as important as any character, as a more experienced director might have known. Though Jonathan Tunick, the show's original orchestrator, does his best with this pint-sized pit band, it's really very difficult to evoke the allure of Rudolf Friml or Victor Herbert with fourteen guys. At every moment when you want it to transport you, the band sounds undernourished.

This new *Follies*, indeed, seems more like a monument to the follies of our own time. Today's theater, partly through straitened circumstances and partly because of inverted snobbery, tells us that small is beautiful. We're all familiar with those one-set three-man plays that seem to be the most you can expect for sixty bucks these days. But *Follies* demands opulence, and, when you play against it for whatever spurious intellectual justification, you're starving the show. In fairness to the Roundabout's accountants, the problem is not just budgetary. Kathleen Marshall, a choreographer who invariably rises above her material, turns in her worst work in years. Mark Thompson's set makes the most of the Belasco's faded charms and gets off to a cute start by using the rusting fire escape as a Ziegfeldian staircase. But the last twenty-five minutes of the show are virtually all-singing, all-dancing, and here Warchus more or less parachutes out of the production. The fantasy Loveland is supposed to rise from the rubble of the theater as the four protagonists confront the follies of their lives in songs that teeter on the brink of nervous breakdowns. Instead, in this production, everything that can go wrong does: the band sounds terrible, the set looks awful, the singing is thin, and the poor actors go undirected, stumbling from style to style, straining for effect. I've no idea who staged this last portion: Miss Marshall doesn't seem to have got a look in, and Warchus evidently had little interest.

This is as bad as anything to be seen on the New York stage, and in a way it's a glimpse of *Follies*'s future: the men who staged the show in the Seventies and Eighties—Hal Prince, Michael Bennett, Herb Ross, Mike Ockrent, Bob Avian—understood the world Sondheim was bidding farewell to. Warchus doesn't, and so the precision of the score's pastiche is lost in the leaden generalities of the production. Warchus has shrunk the show to a bleak, shrill four-hander of domestic sterility interrupted by bum production numbers. Go back to that 1960 photograph of Gloria Swanson standing in the rubble. There are worse ways for a theatrical culture to die—more painful, humiliating, protracted—than having the building demolished.

And, in a way, it couldn't happen to a more deserving show. Pupil of Oscar Hammerstein, lyricist to Richard Rodgers, Jule Styne, and Leonard Bernstein, respectively the kings of the musical play, the musical comedy, and the would-be operatic musical, Stephen Sondheim knows more about the Broadway tradition than anyone else alive. And what does he tell us about the writers he pastiches in *Follies*, about Herbert and Romberg and Friml, Kern, Berlin, Gershwin, Porter, Weill, DeSylva, Brown and Henderson, Yip Harburg and Burton Lane and Dorothy Fields? He tells us that these songs are lies. Over a decade ago, already weary of this sort of thing, John Podhoretz wrote a piece for *The Washington Times* bemoaning the fact that the musical had become "an anti-musical, a self-destructive form in which characters were taken to task and made fun of for doing things like bursting into song." *Follies* is the prototype, a show that in its mismatch of book and score ushered in the modern era, when the American musical no longer seems at ease with itself as it did in, for all their daffy incoherence, *Babes in Arms* or *Anything Goes* or *Good News*. Warchus, by doing his best to dampen the appealing novelty turns at *Follies*'s fringes, only finds himself beached on the show's dead heart. In "How Deep is the Ocean?," Irving Berlin wondered: "And if I ever lost you/ How much would I cry?" In "Could I Leave You?," Blythe Danner as Phyllis sings: "How can you wipe tears away/ When your eyes are dry?"

Quite.

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Art

A debt that can never be paid: Stieglitz & American modernism

by William C. Agee

In 1934, Arthur Dove paid tribute to Alfred Stieglitz, writing, "I couldn't have existed as a painter without that super-encouragement." Indeed, it is doubtful that many other early modernists in America would have survived and flourished without Stieglitz; their history is inconceivable without him. His profound impact as artist and catalyst for modern art both here and abroad was made abundantly clear in a landmark exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, "Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries," organized by the museum's curator of photographs, Sarah Greenough.[1]

We already know a great deal about Stieglitz, of course. He has been the subject of numerous exhibitions, as well as many specialized studies by William Innes Homer, Elizabeth Hutton Turner, and Ms. Greenough herself, among others. Of the many efforts devoted to Stieglitz, though, "Modern Art and America" was the largest and most comprehensive, the first attempt to show Stieglitz the artist side by side with the European and American artists he exhibited and championed at his several galleries in New York from 1905 until his death in 1946. The voluminous catalogue—for which, I should state for the record, I wrote an essay on Arthur Dove—will be an indispensable reference.

The exhibition set high standards, opened new perspectives, and posed timely questions for the study of early modernism in America. It was not without its flaws, but these are measured by the very standards it established. From first to last, it was an engrossing, at points mesmerizing, exhibition in which even familiar works were seen in a new light. The first half of the show was beautifully and discreetly installed, allowing the art to speak for itself, with the full confidence that art in and of itself is a powerful medium (these days a novel idea). There were no large and intrusive wall labels "contextualizing" and "explaining" everything (and nothing). It should be a lesson to us all that the galleries were packed with attentive viewers, content to be solely with art of this high order. The first part also was installed in the old galleries of the West Wing where the wainscoting and scale recreated, without gimmicks, the look and intimate feel of Stieglitz's galleries.

Ms. Greenough took pains to reassemble, as much as possible, the works that Stieglitz actually exhibited and collected. This was the real thing, not an approximation, and from the start, we felt as if we were there, witnesses to history in the making. It was thrilling to see gathered in one place watercolors, drawings, and collages by Rodin,

1 "Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries" was on view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from January 28 to April 22, 2001. A catalog of the exhibition, edited by Sarah Greenough, has been published by Bulfinch (616 pages, $75, $55 paper).

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Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, and Braque—the artists who formed the very foundation of modern art—that had been exhibited in the early years at the 291 Gallery (1905–1917). In its insistence on exactitude in the early sections, the exhibition allowed us to experience something of what it must have been like for artists and public alike to see work so dramatically different from anything shown previously.

Of special note was the small 1906 *Nude in the Forest*, the first painting by Henri Matisse to be shown and acquired in America. It had apparently been recently cleaned, for it fairly radiated a brilliance of color and texture far beyond its modest size. Matisse's pure color modeling vividly reminded us just why this painting was so radical and how it demonstrated to American artists the possibilities of color as an independent expressive element. Until now the influence of this powerful lesson in color had never been fully understood, or remarked upon. We will have to reassess its effect on emerging American artists, among them Arthur Dove. We have always known that Dove's early work was deeply affected by Matisse, but this painting, which was owned by the artist and framer George Of, a close friend of Stieglitz, has never been considered as a source. It is but one of the questions the show posed, one of the many historical and artistic points it made, contrary to the observation of *The New York Times* reviewer that the exhibition broke no new ground.

In the first rooms of the exhibition, which traced Stieglitz's early ventures in modernism, we witnessed the remarkable growth of his own art and his understanding of advanced painting. It has long been a common misreading of Stieglitz to view him as a "messiah" to American art (see again the *Times* review), a prophet who descended from on high with full-blown truths about modern art. Born in 1864, he was a generation older than most of the Americans he showed, but he was not born a modernist —no one was. He had to explore and discover new art as he went, just as those around him did. He learned from the art he showed, as did the younger artists such as Hartley, Dove, and Marin. The understanding that Stieglitz related to American artists more as a fellow student than as teacher-disciple has been slow in coming.

Unfortunately, the show missed an opportunity to document the full extent of Stieglitz's commitment, prior to 1914, to the nascent American modernists. From the start, Stieglitz insisted on showing new and unknown American art concurrently with acknowledged European masters. But only the early watercolors of John Marin are here to illustrate this core principle. Beyond Marin, we looked in vain for any evidence that Stieglitz exhibited early works by Dove, Alfred Maurer, Max Weber, and Arthur B. Carles, works that became central to early modernist American art. I had hoped for at least a few token works from Stieglitz's landmark exhibition of 1910, "Younger American Artists," but there was nary an indication in "Modern Art and America" that it ever occurred.

It was a serious omission, as was the absence of anything from Dove's first one-man show in 1912, which included works pivotal to American modernism. It diluted our sense of the full impact, the full extent of Stieglitz's activities. By showing Americans concurrently with Europeans, Stieglitz was insisting that American art must, and in fact could, stand on its own, as an art of quality and accomplishment. He thereby set standards for Americans to attain, pushing and challenging them. His message was clear and unequivocal—one had to measure up, because modern art was subject to the same levels of commitment and achievement as older art. He encouraged and sustained them, but he was more than a grandfatherly cheerleader for American artists. The call he issued, the standards he set —both in his own art and in the art he showed—helped to establish New York as an important satellite of modernism.

Stieglitz's belief that American art could more than stand up to European art was

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amply confirmed in April 1916 when he exhibited forty of Marsden Hartley's recent abstractions. These paintings, primarily the "German Officer" series, are surely a high point of early American modernism, rivaled only by the *Compositions* done in Paris in 1916 by Patrick Henry Bruce (1881–1936). Some ten of these Hartleys were shown in Washington, and they alone made the trip a must. Georgia O'Keeffe's remark that they were like hearing a "brass band in a closet" is apt, and one can only imagine how forty of them would have looked in the cramped quarters of 291. It was as if Stieglitz, reversing the usual perspective, had issued a challenge to the Europeans for them to match the level of these American paintings. He was on sure ground, for the exhibition in Washington definitively reaffirmed that these are world-class paintings, equaled at the time only by Picasso and Matisse.

Among the most interesting, and lesser known, of the Hartleys is the 1914 *Aero*, an ode to the recent glories of aviation and the conquest of space. It recalls the well-known paintings on the same theme by Robert Delaunay and Roger de la Fresnaye, artists associated with the Orphic and Puteaux Cubists, who were devoted to incorporating themes of modern life in a contemporary pictorial idiom. Not so well known—to art historians, anyway—is Stieglitz's version: the 1910 photograph *Airplane*, which was not part of the exhibition. This photograph, along with others that are in the show such as *City of Ambition* and *Old and New New York*, document the impact of modern urban life in the same way as the Parisian works. The photographs demonstrate how prescient Stieglitz was in defining modern themes and just how quickly Americans established themselves as an integral part of modern art, a point the show made over and over. It also pointed out the close relationship between photography and painting, a matter of greatest importance to Stieglitz. Throughout the exhibition we can see how he learned from painting and how American painters, especially Dove, in turn responded to the challenge presented by the modernity and by the "reality" of photography, both formally and thematically.

Stieglitz's fascination with modern New York predicted Marin's famous images of the city and Picabia's remarkable interpretations, both of which were well represented in Washington. After 1920, Dove also responded to the suggestions in Stieglitz's potent themes of sky and clouds and to the challenge of making a painting as small as but equal in power to a photograph. The exhibition suggested that we need to explore more fully the impact Stieglitz had *as an artist*—not just on photography, but on the course of painting itself, above and beyond his role as exhibition organizer. Ever since Picabia's 1915 symbolic, barbed portrait of Stieglitz as a broken camera, it has been fashionable to deride him as somewhat old and out of date. The show made clear that, in fact, he remained an inspiring and innovative source for artists throughout his long life.

Paintings, sculptures, and drawings by Picasso, Braque, Kandinsky, and Brancusi, exhibited and collected by Stieglitz, were brought together for the first time. They offered one revelation after another. For example, Kandinsky's 1912 *Improvisation # 27: The Garden of Love*, acquired by Stieglitz from the Armory Show, showed the possibilities of open color and biomorphic abstraction and would affect American artists from Dove to Gorky. The influence of Kandinsky's singular painting pervades Dove's early work, but this was not evident in "Modern Art and America," which omitted not just Dove's early work but failed adequately to represent him throughout.

The early Cubist drawings and collages by Braque and Picasso, too, allowed us to ponder their real, specific influence on American art. These works have been reproduced countless times, but to see them here was to understand their transforming powers for artists such as Weber and Dove, for example, alas, both once more absent. It is here that the tradition of "working out of the materials"—a credo formulated first by

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Stieglitz himself, in 1903, and so important to our best art throughout the twentieth century—was first evident to Americans. Stieglitz's engagement with Duchamp, Picabia, and De Zayas was also well documented. In Picabia's machinist drawings we find the origin of American precisionism, and in the notorious *Fountain*, famously photographed by Stieglitz, we trace the beginning of the Duchamp-Dada tradition in this country that to this day, for better or worse, continues to shape much of our art.

To this point the exhibition was, despite its omissions, exact and carefully considered. But it began to veer somewhat off its course as it moved through the post-1917 exhibitions organized by Stieglitz at the Anderson Galleries, the Intimate Gallery, and, finally, An American Place. In some ways, the sudden loss of direction is not surprising, since the course of American modernism after 1920 has not yet been studied fully, and we have only begun to consider the later careers of artists such as Dove and Hartley. O'Keeffe was more generously represented than any other artist, except Stieglitz himself. This was fine, if the show was opting to be an ode to their storied romance or another O'Keeffe retrospective, which we do not need. But the weight given to O'Keeffe was far greater than her actual significance as an artist required and certainly not in keeping with an exhibition that set a broader purpose. To be sure, some of her best paintings, such as *Black, White and Blue* of 1930—the last painting seen on leaving the show—were here, but there were at least a few which added little to her stature or to the show itself. A little sentiment is fine, but not at the cost of excluding other notable artists. We need to remember that in 1917, when he first showed O'Keeffe, Stieglitz also held important exhibitions of Gino Severini and Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Futurism had an impact on American art, as did the color synchromies of Macdonald-Wright, which in all probability affected O'Keeffe's use of color. Not only viewers, but also O'Keeffe herself, would have been better served had at least a sampling from these shows been included and a few mediocre O'Keeffe's left out. It is true that Stieglitz held O'Keeffe shows almost annually, but he did the same for Marin and Dove to the end of their lives.

A full selection of Stieglitz's photographs—including the cloud pictures in the *Music* and *Equivalents* series done after 1920 when he was at the height of his powers—reaffirmed his stature as one of the greatest American artists. They reminded us that first and foremost Stieglitz was an artist of the highest achievement, and it was for this that he himself wished to be remembered.

The exhibition, though, then distorted its stated purpose, so well maintained earlier on, by including a number of Hartley paintings from after 1937, when he and Stieglitz severed their relationship, which had been steadily deteriorating for at least ten years. Make no mistake, they are great paintings, and they are a joy to behold. But they have nothing to do with Stieglitz and his galleries, despite a lame wall label weakly claiming that Stieglitz made them possible. After 1920, O'Keeffe, Marin, and Dove were the American artists with whom Stieglitz felt the deepest kinship. Marin was beautifully represented in the 1930s but by only one work from after 1940, when his oils achieved a new level of intensity. The post-1940 art of Marin and Dove marks the intersection of the early American modernists with the emerging younger generation of Pollock, Gorky, and de Kooning, a crucial fusion that needs further study. Almost singlehandedly Stieglitz had brought American modernism to this point, and one wishes the exhibition had done more to make this clear, for it is one of Stieglitz's great legacies.

Something there is about the National Gallery of Art that does not fully warm to Dove, to whom Duncan Phillips across town made such a deep and abiding commitment. A wary tension existed between Stieglitz and Phillips in regard to their close, and competing, attention to Dove

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after 1926, when Phillips began to collect Dove in depth and to provide a monthly stipend for him. This old prickly relationship is still felt in Washington, unwitting, one hopes, but there nevertheless. Dove had fewer works here than any other major figure in the Stieglitz circle, giving the viewer an unbalanced view of the history of American art. Nor were Dove's paintings seen to best advantage. By scattering them through four separate areas, we never got a full concentration of their unique power.

At the same time it should be said that the cold stone corridors, not really galleries, that housed the later sections of the show were a detriment to all the works. Dove's great collage of 1925, *Goin' Fishin'*, a marvel of the felt reality of the handmade, was virtually invisible on an isolated wall. It was a shame as the paintings that were here were well selected and among Dove's best, including the iconic *That Red One* of 1944. They are landscapes, but they are just as modern as works featuring the latest urban novelty. Stieglitz and his artists understood the difference between an American style and an American subject matter, a point made by John McCoubrey forty years ago, but overlooked in recent writing on American art.

With fewer Doves included, we missed other, essential parts of Stieglitz's importance, of how with his nurturing and the constant challenge of his own art, he inspired Dove to push the limits of his art, for at the end of his life Dove was a better artist than when he began, not always the case in American art. We miss just how Stieglitz and Dove continued late in life to expand the possibilities of abstract art, a quest begun more than thirty years earlier. The National Gallery has a large collection of Dove's late watercolors, done after 1940. They are small paintings on paper, measuring no more than 3 x 4 inches, and they are hardly known. They show, among other things, Dove striving to equal the intensity and power of Stieglitz's photographs, many of which are the very same size. A choice selection of them would have made a telling point about the specific ways in which Stieglitz and his artists continued to interact both artistically and personally. Also absent were the two Stieglitz photographs that Dove bought in 1942 and that inspired several of his best late paintings. With a few more paintings, the small works would have helped to fill in the large areas of our understanding of modernism in the Thirties and Forties; they would have made it all the clearer why Dove is still cherished by painters today.

Nevertheless, "Modern Art and America" is a great show, as far as it goes, which is a long way. We can be grateful for it, and we will be working from it for years to come. In its omissions, regrettable as they are, the exhibition may actually come closer to an essential truth: Stieglitz was so large, far larger than this space, that we may never know all of him or what he has meant to our art.

Exhibition notes

"Out of the Fifties—Into the Sixties:
6 Figurative Expressionists,"
at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York.
March 15–May 5, 2001

In this captivating and instructive show, "figurative expressionist" refers to those artists who, in Michael Rosenfeld's words, "rejected the tenets of abstract expressionism and embraced the human figure." Unlike the so-called second generation of Abstract Expressionists, followers of Willem de Kooning who also embraced representation in the Fifties, Rosenfeld's artists did not fall neatly into any one school or style. What primarily distinguishes them as a group is their use of the figure at a time when abstraction held sway over most artistic imaginations and by the fact that they did not presage the rise of pop art in the early Sixties. The group included the African-American artists Beauford Delaney (1901–1979) and Bob Thompson (1937–1966),

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Leon Golub, Red Grooms, Lester Johnson, and the German-born American Jan Müller (1922–1958).

Golub, perhaps the most famous among them, is represented by three works, all in his characteristic primitive style—derived in part from art brut. *Head I* (1966), for example, employs bare, stabbing strokes of black, mauve, and white acrylic on linen to describe the unclothed torso and head of a man. His pained visage and tense, muscled body harmonize ideally—and typically for Golub—with the stark means and materials with which they are painted. Like Golub, Johnson approaches the figure with similarly stripped-down methods. Using broad strokes of thick oil paint and few colors, he records only the outlines of his haunting figures, allowing the paint itself—its drips, globs, pools, and fluid passages—to imbue them with emotion and individual traits. On a gray ground, a few heavy strokes of black paint form the facial oval, eyes, nose, and mouth in the unstrainingly simple *Untitled (Head)* (1962).

With his childlike renderings of figures in a forest, Müller's comparatively more lush primitivism reminds one of a muted Douanier Rousseau. In both his canvases, *The Trysting Place* (c. 1957) and *The Search for the Unicorn* (1957), simple lines stand in for facial features: a red line for the mouths of the nude peachy-fleshed women lying on the ground with black lines for the eyes and nose; and slightly thicker lines for the white-faced figures on horseback staring at the women. Similarly pared down to basic shapes in pastoral settings, Bob Thompson's four works favor strong, contrasting colors, which impart more energy and movement to his compositions than one finds in Müller's. Thompson, who had an affinity with Matisse and the Fauves, evinced the most joyous sensibility of the artists on view, one that celebrates the primeval dance of life and is anchored by an unerring sense of color.

Neither of Grooms's two works reflect the later, comic-book style of drawing for which he is known. To my mind the weakest of the painters on view, Grooms here does avoid the glib and kitsch-laden clichés of the later style, but the paintings hardly indicate a more promising, if unexplored, route for the artist. His portrait *Gauguin* (1963) is a pastiche of Gauguin in heavily applied oil and his *Three Bathers* (1959) is a thin study of three figures—two males and a female—painted in a childlike hand on cardboard cut-outs pasted on blue-painted canvas.

Delaney also resorts to pastiche, of Van Gogh in this case, in *James Baldwin* (c. 1955), with its swirling brushstrokes and light-toned palette, curiously so for Baldwin's skin. Delaney's icon-like portrait *Bernard Hassell* (c. 1962) shows more originality, using bright yellow for the skin and hair, causing the wide-open white and black eyes to appear brighter and more otherworldly. Relying mainly on skillful chromatic contrasts, Delaney mixed yellow and blue in the figure's sweater, and placed the whole against a dark purple and black ground. Though his features are more attentively modeled in his *Self-Portrait* (1964), Delaney again used complementary and contrasting colors, setting the brown and yellow face against a bright yellow ground.

What is clear from this show is that, for all but Delaney, "Figurative Expressionism" entailed some version of primitivism, a raw admonition to the comparatively reserved versions of American realism against which both the Abstract and Figurative Expressionists rebelled. For the artists in this show, however, that rebellion also meant not shying away from social commentary, though, happily, in none of the works on view is aesthetics enslaved to a political message. To his credit, Rosenfeld put together a group show of artists whose affinities are evident, with just enough idiosyncrasy in his choices to make the whole a revelation.

"Graham Nickson: Recent Paintings,"
at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, New York.
April 3–28, 2001

Viewers unfamiliar with Graham Nickson's work were likely put off by his recent show

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of six large canvases at Salander-O'Reilly, put off, that is, by an assault of shockingly bright acrylic color. Currently the dean of the New York Studio School and the recipient of numerous awards and grants, Nickson is an exceptionally well-trained artist, one who certainly knows the difference between vibrant colors and ones that induce nausea. As has long been noted during his career, Nickson is an excellent draughtsman, and he has a beguiling way with composition, so we should guard against the sort of knee-jerk reactions to his work that would pronounce them monstrously gauche, fit only for a sidewalk art sale. (I must admit, that was my first reaction.) In a catalogue essay for a show last year at the Frye Art Museum, the artist Andrew Forge acknowledged that Nickson's "color is extreme," while noting that his watercolors have "a warmth and an unpredictable sensuality that the acrylics seem to exclude in the interest of timeless order." Acrylic paint does, in fact, seem to be a problem in these works: quite simply, it can be an ugly medium, harshly reflecting light in colors that never seem natural (and, oddly enough, even the two works in oil look like acrylics).

Not that naturalism is the goal of Nickson's paintings, but a certain level of realism is. For instance, in *Balloon Woman* (2001) a woman in a blue bikini in the foreground of a lake or riverside beach scene holds a bunch of blue and black balloons aloft. The setting sun transforms the beach on which she stands into a strip of dark reds, oranges, maroons, and pinks, which contrast strongly with a band of dark greens, blues, violets, and purples representing the water behind the woman. Across the water, conical hills are deep purple, and, above them, the sky blushes peach and orange. Presented frontally, with the weight of her flesh rendered palpable by Nickson's heavy drawing style, the balloon woman faces west, into the setting sun, which mottles her skin in rosy tones and casts her shadow behind her.

Simply listing the colors used in this and the other works at Salander would give a sense of how aggressively Nickson jostles the wide range of hues and how forcefully they strike the viewer. This visual strategy comes to the fore in the least figural of the paintings, *Traveler: Red Sky* (2001), where, at the very bottom of this large work, a long column of caravan voyagers parades over a landscape of purple, blue, and black hills, leaving the top five-sixths or so of the linen canvas open for a study of the colors of the evening sky—a riot of magentas, reds, pinks, purples, violets, greens, oranges, blues, and yellows.

It is not with color, however, that Nickson seduces the viewer, but with composition and narrative. The muscular back of a man holding a beach blanket in his outstretched arms so that he forms a cross —though rather more like a gymnast than a Christ figure—dominates *Sanctuary II* (1996–2001). Around him, four other figures prepare to leave the beach, itself a spit of land between two yellow bodies of water, at day's end. On the man's right, two women offer scraps of food to a great swarm of gulls above their heads; on his left, another women covers her face with a bent arm, as if she has gotten sand in her eye, and, in the background, a woman folds a red towel in front of a lifeguard's chair.

Commendable as it is to challenge our largely unspoken aesthetic prohibitions against potentially mawkish sunset images and against using candy-shop colors, Nickson does not, to my eye, succeed in demonstrating why these prohibitions hinder contemporary painting. In this show, color tends to upstage his ability as a draughtsman, his compositional energy, and his suggestively restrained, inviting narratives.

—*Daniel Kunitz*

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Dance

Taylor's domain

by Laura Jacobs

A dancer in Paul Taylor's company is not a bona fide "Paul Taylor dancer" until he or she develops a particular curve within a phrase. You see it most readily when the dancer runs in a circle in those little scuffing-slipper steps of which Taylor is so fond—the way the entire body is magnetically flexed to the center, the spine answering that empty space, the chin and shoulder listening, as if the dancer had been turned on a potter's wheel. Except the dancer is not clay but muscle, and the space is not empty at all, but a volume or vacuum with its own agenda. Taylor dancers run and jump, walk and crawl, jerk and twitch. But they are never more Taylor dancers than when they move in circles, even if they are circling themselves in one spot on the stage. It is in circles and rings and centrifugal swings that we see them for what they are: forces of nature.

And yet Taylor dancers don't pirouette. Oh, scour the repertory and you might find some. These would be exceptions that prove the rule. The pirouette of classical dance takes place on pointe or demi-pointe, and is an act of high artifice, generally a three-step structure consisting of 1) a codified preparation in plié (like a deep breath), 2) up on toe and twirl (the final swirls of a Dairy Queen cone or the coloratura's most difficult trill), 3) down and repose (to show you didn't fall). Taylor has no interest in preparations, and he likes falls—his incomparable *Esplanade* contains a pelting summer storm of flying falls. As for the pirouette, it is something no animal would ever do, and therefore Taylor dancers don't do them either. It's too superego—though he might say prissy or stuffy.

Taylor spent his formative years in the dances of Martha Graham, a mythic realm where superego is constantly grabbed at the heel and pulled down, undermined by id. As a dancer with Graham's company in the 1950s, Taylor knew the fight firsthand, for it is worked into the Graham technique where a dancer's bright breastbone, his or her angelic liftedness, is constantly undercut, halved and jack-knived inward in Graham contractions, hungers of the gut and groin. Martha Graham was Modern Dance, the opposite of Ballet. She dragged dance kicking into a big empty box of sanctified space, then filled it with totems and taboos, mysteries of the couch post-Freud and mid-Jung. Still, Victorian-born, circa 1895, she never let go that golden thread to Heaven.

Taylor severed the thread. Not for him Graham's ancient oracles and high priestess pronouncements which assume, by extension, the divinity of man. "I believe in Darwin," he told *The New York Times* in March, just before his two-week season at City Center, "and the natural world." And so the tracks and grooves of Taylor technique grow out of the grounded muscularity, the insular physics, of the animal kingdom: the racehorse's heavy tilt into the turn, the big cat's jazzy, deep-shouldered directional shifts within the chase, the con-

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centrated stillnesses of both prey and predator, the easy elegant grazing on grasses. Taylor dancers are always Homo sapiens—descended from the apes—human animals rather than human beings. This is a profound distinction.

And it is uniquely Taylor's. Even if he didn't spell it out every once in a while—in *Three Epitaphs*, where black-masked dancers droop and stoop like the primordial ooze they crawled out of, or *Cloven Kingdom*, which quotes Spinoza in the program note, "Man is a social animal," and sees four men in tails (evening clothes, not fur) performing a series of chest-beating tribal rites—the Taylor dancer embodies this distinction, spelling it out in his or her musculature: strong calves, solid rear, compact and seamless upper body, and again, that flex and curve within a phrase, as if these dancers were bred for leverage, a bipedal torque and balance that lets them roar within the radius of their own limbs, not needing to transcend their bodies as ballet dancers aspire to do (ballet dancers in Taylor are like helium balloons tied to a rail, tugging toward the sky). When the eight o'clock curtain comes up on a Paul Taylor program, it is a thrill distinct from any other in dance. These breathing creatures braced before us, they may not have moved a muscle but the energy is already flying. And if it's just men onstage, as in *Cascade*, one of this season's program openers, the thrill doubles, because Taylor men, even those who ride a fine line of chubbiness, are magnificent—the NFL and Michelangelo's *David*, Man o' War and Mister Ed, all rolled up in one.

Taylor has a New York season once a year, and in that season he usually presents two new works. He likes introducing new works in twos, and there is often an obvious duality in what he's done, one dance savage, the other soft, or maybe acid and ice cream, cutting edge and elegy, sci-fi and slapstick (this March it was *Fiends Angelical* and *Dandelion Wine*, sinister and sunny, but both a bit labored). This game of oppositions is yet another pitch and curve within the repertory, as if Taylor is saying he's not subject to any one theatrical tradition or temperament, not placing one ideal above another. Taylor isn't in thrall to any ideal, to any dogma beyond Darwin's: objective observance of the natural world. What he sees is what we get. And he sees like a collector—in genus, in genres, in populations and pools.

This makes great sense for a dance company, which is tribal after all, and it's one of the reasons Taylor has enjoyed such longevity: he never runs out of subjects, specimens. It's also a reason Taylor gets attacked every few years by critics who want more "adult sexuality" on his stage, another way of saying they want more conventional male-female partnering—the R-rated repartee of movies or the only-you romanticism of Balanchine (which is another way of saying they're not getting their quota of vicarious thrill, i.e., self-projection into the clinches). Taylor isn't concerned with the genital stirrings of character A for character B; he's more interested in the group pheromone, as in his megahit of 1992, *Company B*, in which erotic energies are heightened, enlarged, by WWII and the threat of premature death. Taylor's most recent masterpiece, *Piazzolla Caldera*, really is R-rated, a rite of spring wearing the black lace of the bull ring, wielding a sharp tango heel, and complete with sacrificial maiden—a girl who's sort of slutty. But again, the soloists who momently come forward in their own dank spotlight, showing us their ache or itch, are always step-locked back into the whole, the teeming backroom pool of vice and desire, where they take their place in the pattern, linked up in the eternal circle.

This locking device of Taylor's is yet another aspect of the compleat Paul Taylor dancer. When they want to they can end a phrase like a gong, striking stillness with such energy that you see a bit of kickback, a vibration that anchors the image. As with the full-body curve, not all Taylor dancers lock in with the same weight and impact. It tends to be senior dancers, especially senior men, who achieve this level of virtuosity. And it may be a prerequisite to ascent with-

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in the company. The amazing Andrew Asnes, with his lush musculature almost laughably perfect and a happy hunger to do it all bigger, faster, cleaner—he could ring like a bell. When Asnes left the company last year, the gleaming Patrick Corbin slid effortlessly into seniority, more understated, stylized, his crew-cut centurion's profile a portrait in helmeted concentration and strength. Corbin's performances aren't introverted, but to some extent he is. As the critic Joel Lobenthal observed, "He comes onstage with a concept," which means he's not go-with-the-flow, he is the flow. Corbin's presence in a dance is like the vibrant hum of a tuning fork, a subliminal wave in the atmosphere. He's the most elegant male dancer in America. And when he's unsubtle, he's that much funnier. In *Company B*, as geeky Johnny the girls can't get enough of ("You're not handsome it's true/ but when I look at you/ Johnny O Johnny O Johnny O"), when Corbin pushes his chess-champ glasses back up his nose he bucks his head as if swallowing a pill—all on a dotted note. You wonder, where's the Adam's apple? The spaz timing is sublime.

But this is yet another level on which Taylor works, the way he's willing to amplify his own compositional tactics and tics for an air-quote, cartoon quality. In *Funny Papers*, a throwaway dance from 1994 that looks larger and wittier with every passing year (it was only this season I noticed the spoof on Merce Cunningham that sits near the start), the lock effect is like the heavy outline in a comic strip. In 1999's *Oh, You Kid!*, the company's senior female Lisa Viola has a sideshow solo that fuses Bloody Mary from *South Pacific* with Dainty June from *Gypsy*. A tour de force for Viola, it's one of the weirdest solos Taylor has ever devised, a string of vaudeville kicks and tricks, with poses so heavily punctuated they read like deadpan double-takes. The whole thing is reverb.

Perhaps the deepest reverberation in Taylor is one that is unconscious. In 1980 Taylor paid brilliant homage to Vaslav Nijinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, that grand spasm of 1913, the first aesthetic breakaway of the twentieth century. Taylor's own *Sacre du Printemps (The Rehearsal)* uses the two-piano reduction of Stravinsky's score, thus creating a black-and-white tonality perfect for his cinematic take on the subject: Taylor's *Sacre* is Hollywood noir, a two-reel ritual, comic and tragic. Still, in his autobiography, *Private Domain* (1987), Taylor mentions Nijinsky only once, noting that in college he read a biography of the dancer-choreographer and found it "fascinating." It is the place of Nijinsky in dance history—a dark, heavy hinge—that sounds in Taylor repertory like an echo from the depths, a kind of unbidden muscle memory.

"I am a man and not a beast . . . I am a man and not God . . . I am the earth." Nijinsky's struggle to understand what he was, what the life of the body is meant to be, plays out in his diaries—madly imaginative or just plain mad depending on one's tolerance for poetic obsession splintering into nonsense. The same struggle, however, found a pagan formality in Nijinsky's dances. In *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* his nymphs and faun (which he danced) are stylized sideways, moving in a kind of bas relief that grounds them. Tight twists at the waist accentuate the feral tension between two and three dimensions, between Debussy's throbbing swirl of sound and physiques so flattened they might be slipping between senses (Mallarmé's poem lies somewhere between memory and dream). In *Sacre* a year later, Nijinsky's stooped and circling peasants curl their hands in at the wrists, little fists of introversion, blunt and mute. Their hands and feet have become clubs and hooves with which they beat out ritual time on hard ground, setting the stage for sacrifice, a girl's death for the good of the crops —"I am the earth." At their premieres, shortly before the stroke of WWI, these dances were considered blasphemous. Even today, ninety years later, they remain symbols hot to the touch, intense metaphors for a sudden internal plunge, an inarticulate, irrevocable shift in the mind-body balance.

Taylor's *Sacre* was not part of the pro-

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gramming this season, but his *Arabesque* was. When it premiered in 1999, I dismissed the dance as not up to much, a little stop-start, and tonally odd (the use of Debussy in a bare-chested temple dance). This year, though, it shone like aged ivory, and its rhythms had the jump and flicker of a candle flame. A note under the title calls *Arabesque* "an ornate pattern with reflected figures," and if the dance had a set, it might be a shadowy mihrab carved and niched with Islamic arabesques. But the "reflected figure" is not just the arabesque. Santo Loquasto's costumes nod to a Diaghilev-era exoticism, the Ballets Russes of *Schéhérazade* and *Le Dieu Bleu*—ballets in which Nijinsky starred. Moreover, it was the music of Debussy that Nijinsky used in two of his three iconoclastic ballets. And the dancers' hands—they're curled in that little *Sacre* club-fist. Taylor's reflected figure is Nijinsky, and, thinking back over the Taylor repertory, one begins to feel that Nijinsky's footprint may have left a more pungent impression than Graham's (for all her talk about the ground, Graham's bare foot is never dirty). So much swarm and sacrifice in the dances of Paul Taylor, the call of the wild by moonlight and altar-light. And so often a use of the body in profile, faun-like, with that twist at the waist to show the animal is man. Indeed, Nijinsky's famously thick-legged, round-muscled physique is pure Taylor. On the other hand: critical distance, peace with man's place in the food chain, an ease and strength within the skin. Maybe this is why audiences leave Taylor in such high spirits. He's just so balanced.

The program that began with *Arabesque* closed with *Musical Offering*, a dance first performed in 1986. It was an achievement then, a high-water mark both choreographically and in terms of execution. Because dancing is so grueling (especially dancing Taylor) and the career of a dancer so short, companies continually blossom and drop over the years, depending on how many within the company are hitting and holding their stride, how many are past prime or not yet there. Taylor's company right now, except for Corbin, Viola, Kristi Egtvedt, and Richard Chen See, is in an immature phase (with Michael Trusnovec coming on like an engine). When Taylor joined the dancers in their curtain call after *Musical Offering*, he gave them a thumbs up, a gesture I've never seen him make before, as if to say "you got through." But the company in the mid-to-late Eighties was flush, shoulder-deep in compleat Paul Taylor dancers. And *Musical Offering*—a dance built out of circles and curls, ringing stops and stillnesses struck in stone—seemed to rise up like a monument to the company's palpable, physical coherence. It is a dance that Taylor calls "a requiem." But for what? The short life of the dancer? The cyclic rise and fall of the company?

It is set to Anton Webern's orchestration of Bach's sixteen-part exploration of one theme—its own circling monument to Baroque musical structure. Leave it to Taylor to hear in this steeple of sound the crying voice of an ancient culture. But listen to the theme; it does seem to blow down over a mountain path. And the dancers respond to it with awe and obedience. Taylor sees them as primitive figures, girded in leather loincloths and headbands. He locks them into a language of totemic poses and strange slow-motion leitmotifs: they beat their chests with little fists in a dream trance, making X's over their hearts; they raise their palms, upper body planted back in submission to the sky. And throughout the piece, like a metronome, they rock sideways on stiff legs, another X, as if they are imitating their own statues of worship. These big, simple shapes, keening and mourning, fit into a circulatory system of rounds and whirlpools, stately processions and pietà poses, and soon the dance is just pouring out as from a heavy urn, all its evocations—Bach's everlasting command, Nijinsky's inchoate ritual, the body's mortal matter—joining in one current. It is a long dance, and yet it is never long enough, so sustained is the tone of stoicism, so inventive this vision of wordless lament pouring into emptiness, the salt and sand. Animals die, Taylor seems to say, but what powerful imprints we leave behind.

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Music

New York chronicle: coming up Acis

by Jay Nordlinger

There's a lot of familiar music in Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, but the opera is seldom staged. So it was good to have a New York City Opera production in March and April. But what a strange, even laughable, production!

The set featured orange beach chairs and big blue beach balls (that sounds like Dr. Seuss, doesn't it? "Big blue beach balls"). The guys dressed and pranced like twinkly Troy Donahues, and the gals dressed and pranced like—whoever Troy's female friends were. At the back of the stage lay a giant Cupid on a sloping hill. The audience couldn't help tittering, as titter one had to. Polyphemus rode up and down on an elevator, wearing a miner's hat and leering.

In opera, though—no matter what stage directors and set designers try to do; despite their best efforts to detract—the music's the thing, as was the case here. Choruses were well sung: crisp, tight, and assured. The Galatea, Christine Brandes, has a smallish but well-trained voice. She at times failed to rise above pretty blandness, but shows promise. The Acis, William Burden, had a rough outing (the performance I attended was on March 17), straining and overly hooding the voice. In his struggles, he seemed unwilling, or unable, to let his voice—and it's not a bad one—simply emerge. The production's second tenor, however, was a smash: light, sweet, and free. This was John Tessier, and he should have a fine career. It almost didn't matter that his big, marvelous aria—"Shepherd, what art thou pursuing?"—was staged in an especially asinine way, with the singer breaking into melodramatic hugs with the shepherd. The bass Dean Elzinga, as Polyphemus, sang in a sturdy, though not particularly Handelian, way.

Two dominant questions came out of this performance. First, is it necessary to *stage* the opera? What do we gain from seeing *Acis*, as opposed to merely (merely!) hearing it, with its arias, ensembles, and choruses? This is a work of set pieces. The visual element—the "action"; the story, such as it is—adds little. Does it matter whether a soprano sings "Hark, ye pretty warbling choir" on her knees—"in character"—or concert-style? Do we need to see Acis, in the sublime "Love in her eyes sits playing," feel up his girlfriend on a swing? Does it enhance our enjoyment of the giddy, quicksilver duet "Happy we" that the tenor carries the soprano on his back? I was, believe it or not, glad to see this production, but I say, in the end, no.

The second dominant question (or exclamation, rather) is: isn't Handel's fecundity amazing? *Acis and Galatea*—like *Giulio Cesare* and many others—is an unrelenting outpouring of melody and invention and genius. The entire work is a highlights disc. This opera company, on balance, did well with it. Even with the big blue beach balls.

James Levine is proud of his Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and he is proud of its in-

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dividual players, too, which is one of the reasons he puts on chamber concerts in Weill Recital Hall. The Met Chamber Ensemble is almost an institution in New York now, with its Sunday-afternoon musicales. In these concerts, Levine is not merely a collaborator, not just one of the gang. Much as he may try to blend in, he is the undisputed leader, his imprint on everything.

These concerts usually feature interesting and eclectic programming, and so it was on March 25, when the group did Beethoven, Schoenberg, Ligeti, and Bach, and in that very curious order. The Beethoven was the Quintet for Piano and Winds, Op. 16, an excellent early work in the composer's beloved key of E flat. The players (led by Levine at the piano) were alert, sensitive, and solid. They expressed both the rugged and the lyrical elements of Beethoven. Sometimes these concerts appear underrehearsed—or even unrehearsed—but the Beethoven seemed polished. It was not too dense a performance; it had plenty of light in it. This was, indeed, a remarkably transparent reading. And Levine, as always, seemed to be having a ball (although not one of Dr. Seuss's). He is often rather stiff at the keyboard, and his playing of the Quintet's Andante cantabile was, indeed, a little blocky—lacking that *cantabile*, that singing line, that Beethoven asks for. But Levine is a fine pianist—although perhaps not as good as his mentor, George Szell, who also loved and excelled at chamber playing.

The Schoenberg was the Chamber Symphony for 15 Instruments, Op. 9, an excellent opportunity to show off the virtuosity of the Met players. This is a beautiful, exceptionally intelligent, exceptionally dense work. It hovers between two worlds: you hear in it Austro-Hungarian touches, such as those found in Brahms (who died six years before the piece was composed), and also the beginnings of the new musical language that Schoenberg would perfect. The Met ensemble handled the work superbly, with tight coordination and astounding clarity.

As for Ligeti, his compositions can seem more like math problems than music: but they have value, as evidenced by his *Ramifications* "for twelve solo strings." The Met players made a strong case for it, playing it with precision and putting over its haunting quality. At the close, Levine held his baton in the air for what seemed an absurdly long time. It was hard to see the musical, as opposed to the theatrical, point of it.

To end the evening was the Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major. It was surprisingly rough, detached, and disjointed. This was not a performance that emphasized beauty. In fact, it was coarse, as the players dug into the strings. Coordination was hardly a model here, either—this is one on which they seem to have skimped on rehearsal time. The whole piece was rather bulled through, an error to which Levine is prey. The final Allegro, in particular, felt rushed and unnuanced, with some violin playing that was downright ugly. Levine—supposing, or wanting to assert, that his players had everything under control—stopped conducting altogether, leaving the stage and sitting with the audience to enjoy the last few pages. This was a striking flourish, but its musical wisdom was open to question.

Murray Perahia, not content with being one of the greatest pianists in the world—and one of the greatest in history—is now a conductor. They all get the bug, don't they? Not just pianists, like Daniel Barenboim and Vladimir Ashkenazy, but everybody: violinists (Joseph Silverstein, Vladimir Spivakov), trumpeters (Gerard Schwarz), and even singers (Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Plácido Domingo). What's next? Kathy Battle leading the Mahler Ninth? In any event, Perahia made his New York conducting debut at Avery Fisher Hall on March 28, with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, of which he is "principal guest conductor."

Perahia has long been one of those pianists who conduct earlyish concertos from the keyboard: he recorded all of the Mozarts this way, many years ago, with the English

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Chamber Orchestra. This is never a great idea, even when it's tried by great musicians, such as Perahia and Barenboim. No man can serve two masters: the conducting gets slighted, the playing gets slighted (and distorted), and the result is dissatisfying, a display mainly of ego. The argument, I suppose, is that one musical mind, one musical spirit, presides over the whole affair, making for a unified experience. In practice, it's a loser and a cheat.

Perahia played/conducted two concertos on this program, before getting to a Mozart symphony. First came Mozart's Concerto in G Major, K. 453, one of Mozart's most beautiful, most profound works, and therefore one of the most beautiful and profound works in music. Perahia's playing has suffered some in recent years, in the sad opinion of many of his old admirers. He tries to be a "bigger" pianist now, getting more sound, punching at the keyboard, sometimes pounding, becoming less tidy. He was always a refined, tasteful, poetic pianist, in the tradition of Myra Hess and Dinu Lipatti—he still is. He just shows it rather less. The Mozart concerto was fine, demonstrating that Perahia remains one of the best Mozarteans in the business. But it lacked some of the nobility and spirituality and wonder—in short, the perfection—of his earlier years.

Next was the Bach Concerto in D Minor, in which Perahia, of course, shone—this is a great pianist, come what may—but in which he shone less brightly than he might have. The Adagio didn't quite sing, and the pianist was also somewhat sloppy and indistinct in certain quicker passages. But it was grand to hear Bach played on the piano, and full-heartedly so. Opportunities to hear this music on this glorious instrument are, unfortunately, becoming fewer. The back-to-nature crowd is taking over.

The symphony was the late G-minor one, and Perahia showed himself no slouch with the stick. The qualities that have always (or usually) marked his pianism are present in his conducting. It is only right that a musician as gifted and smart as Perahia should avail himself of a wider repertory, through this new career, or side career, or future full-time career (who knows?). He was exquisite in his phrasing, dynamics, and balances; one almost didn't miss Sir Neville Marriner. If his performance had a fault, it was perhaps an excessive politeness or correctness. The piece had the feeling of the Mozart serenade known as "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik," and the symphony should be bigger, weightier, in scope and feel. But then, we had on stage a chamber orchestra.

Christoph Eschenbach may be the busiest, most jet-setting conductor there is. He will succeed Wolfgang Sawallisch as music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra in the 2003–04 season. He is already the chief of the Orchestre de Paris, and of the NDR Symphony Orchestra (Hamburg), and of the Schleswig-Holstein Festival, and of the Ravinia Festival. He is also conductor laureate of his old band, the Houston Symphony Orchestra. The man gets around, and he is a worthy pianist (there's that theme again) to boot.

Eschenbach guest-conducted the New York Philharmonic in late March. (I heard the performance that took place on the 29th.) Opening the program with a group of Strauss songs was Barbara Bonney, the American soprano who has reason to believe she is descended from Billy the Kid (real name: William Bonney). Several years ago, she commissioned a piece from André Previn on the old outlaw. Indeed, she has made a specialty of American and English music, in which she is superb, with her clarity, simplicity, and sincerity.

Her Strauss, on this occasion, was not top-drawer, though Bonney is unquestionably a top-drawer singer. Little "Wiegenlied," for example, could have been dreamier; it failed to cast the spell it should. Her intonation wasn't up to her usual standard, as in the difficult passages from "Ich wollt' ein Sträusslein binden." Hers is usually a penetrating voice, but it could not be heard over the orchestra in some of the low notes, which was annoying. Her "Ruhe, meine

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Seele!" was affecting, the best of the set; "Morgen," however, was so slow and self-conscious, it almost flopped. This was not really the Bonney we know, and applaud.

After intermission, Eschenbach led the orchestra in Mahler's Sixth Symphony. He is a bull of a man and a bull of a conductor. His every thought and intention, he enacts on the podium. It is hard to imagine a more physical conductor. He did not draw from the Philharmonic an especially beautiful sound, but the symphony had (by and large) tautness and drama, and he was determined to wring from the players all he could. The Sixth gives first-desk men plenty of chance to show their stuff. Clarinetist Stanley Drucker was phenomenal, as he customarily is. Trumpeter Philip Smith was smooth and secure (also as customary). French hornist Philip Myers, however, had a rough day, with clumsy onsets, a strained tone, and an excess of flubbed notes.

The conductor did not deliver a Sixth for the ages. The Scherzo's relaxed, charming parts weren't especially relaxed and charming; this movement should include a *ländler* feeling, missing here. And in the Andante, a warmer sound would have been desirable (which reminds us: what will Eschenbach do with the fabled Philadelphia sound? Keep it Philadelphian?). Furthermore, the symphony, particularly in its final movement, fell into an episodic state, although I should add quickly that to keep the thread going in this piece is a near-impossibility.

Christoph Eschenbach, partly by default, is an important conductor. If nothing else, Philadelphians will enjoy watching him. But Eugene Ormandy, that example of restraint on the podium, may roll over a little bit.

A word about James Levine's schedule: On the night of Thursday, April 12, he conducted Berg's *Lulu* (about four hours); on Friday night, he conducted Wagner's *Parsifal* (about five and a half hours); and on Saturday afternoon, he was back in the pit for Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Who knows how many other things he accomplished in this time? With apologies to James Brown, this other James may be "the hardest-working man in show business."

There were two main reasons to see and hear the *Ariadne*: Deborah Voigt, soprano, and Susanne Mentzer, mezzo-soprano. They are a couple of youngish Americans, and they are among the very best singers before the public today. Mentzer, as The Composer, turned in a stirring performance, full of character and life. There is iron in her mezzo—and a thrilling top—and every note she sings commands attention and respect. She was even able to sound like a young man (this is a trouser role), though she looked like the beautiful woman she is, dressed up butchly. There are, in fact, two astonishing young American mezzo-sopranos before the public now, and they are easy to confuse: Susanne Mentzer and Susan Graham. No matter which you think you're going to hear, you're unlikely to be let down.

Voigt is celebrated for many things, not least for her Chrysothemis (*Elektra*), her Sieglinde (*Die Walküre*), and her Aida (guess where?). Ariadne is another role right up her vocal alley, and on this afternoon she did several beautiful things in it. Her voice is extraordinarily big and opulent, but she sometimes uses too much of it; she might husband it, ration it, a little more wisely. She, lucky girl, has so much to spare: why not keep some in reserve? More seriously, she is showing some signs of wear and tear, which—particularly at this stage of her career, meaning, her prime—are alarming. But she ended the opera well, and she had managed her great aria ("Es gibt ein Reich") admirably.

Singing Zerbinetta, the soubrette with a soul, was Lyubov Petrova, a Russian soprano making her Met debut. (She replaced the French sensation Natalie Dessay, who withdrew, citing vocal distress.) Petrova has a strong, clear voice, although one wanting for give, or pliancy. She didn't melt much, and in her most unflattering moments she was strident. But she acquitted herself without embarrassment.

As for men, *Ariadne auf Naxos* has them,

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but Strauss didn't much care about men, so drunk on the female voice was he, so why should we?

Opera note

The Gambler, by Sergei Prokofiev,
at the Metropolitan Opera, New York.

Opera is widely considered to be akin to a tortoise: a thick-hided entity, impervious to change, and moving slowly if at all. The operatic repertory in 1950 featured the ABCs: *Aida*, *Bohème*, and *Carmen*. The repertory in 2001 features the same three. Every year opera companies throughout the United States produce the same thirty or so operas, with now and then a novelty; the most consistent novelty is restricted to the advertising gimmickry used by the swollen marketing departments to sell the ABCs. (A few years ago, the admittedly avant-garde Houston Grand Opera's season brochure was devoted to the dogs of photographer-artist William Wegman in costume. What the divas said about this was not recorded.)

But, as Galileo once opined, "*E pur si muove*." Opera, in its tortoise way, does indeed move, and the last decade or two has seen several surprising changes. One of these is in the area of Slavic opera. At the middle of the last century "Russian opera" consisted of one, perhaps two, Tchaikovsky operas (*Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*), *Boris Godunov*, maybe Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* (both, incidentally, operas introduced to the West by Diaghilev), and a Czech contribution, Smetana's *Bartered Bride*. A few others fitfully appeared to disappear.

Today, that landscape has dramatically changed. If Rimsky-Korsakov remains on the outside and Mussorgsky continues strong (with *Khovanshchina* as well), the twentieth-century masters Shostakovich and Prokofiev have come to center stage and the operas of Dvořák and—more importantly—Leos Janáček are now if not ubiquitous at least frequently encountered. (New York will hear two productions of *The Makropulos Case* this season.) In part, this change is owing to the industry of two conductors, the Janáček specialist Sir Charles Mackerras and the Russian Valery Gergiev.

There is little doubt that the prime force behind the performance in the West of Russian opera has been Gergiev, the dynamo who heads St. Petersburg's Kirov Opera. Gergiev the conductor-impresario came seemingly out of nowhere, and his immense energy has transformed a once respectable but dusty company into an operatic force, overshadowing the more famous Bolshoi Opera of Moscow. In so doing, he has attracted Western monies and sponsorships, and the company has become the magnet for all young Russian singers who want careers in the West. His multitude of recordings with the Kirov have spotlighted the Russian repertory.

Gergiev is reputed to have invented the thirty-hour day with his workaholic habits, the range of his interests, and his apparent ability to be in three places at once. He is also, it should be noted, a first-rate opera conductor, with an emphasis more on fieriness and propulsion than on reflection. As Principal Guest Conductor of the Metropolitan Opera, Gergiev has complemented James Levine in a repertory that Levine largely shuns, while bringing to the Met (both for its seasons and as a visitor with the Kirov Opera) a range of Russian opera largely unknown here.

One of the areas of fruitful exploration is the operas of Sergei Prokofiev. Until quite recently, few people knew anything about Prokofiev's vocal works, for a variety of reasons. His ballets, for a start, were much more popular—it was regularly said that Prokofiev was a ballet, not an opera, composer. Several of the operatic works he wrote, including *The Gambler*, were deemed unsuitable for the Communist state and banned from performance, while his patriotic opera *Semyon Kotko* was considered, outside the Soviet Union, agitprop. His immense, uneven and troubled setting of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* had its vicissitudes,

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with the very size of the undertaking daunting opera companies. Prokofiev may have written eight or nine operas, but the only ones known thirty years ago were *The Love of Three Oranges*, which had its debut in Chicago in 1921, and *The Fiery Angel*.

Today, thanks in large part to the performances and recordings of the Kirov, this has changed. The Kirov production of *The Gambler* arrived at the Met on March 19, and the travelling production of its *War and Peace* is due next season, while there is a rumor that *Semyon Kotko* will be included in the Kirov Opera visit of 2002.

The Gambler was Prokofiev's second mature opera and his first full-length one. Written during the First World War, it was belatedly premiered in a revised version in Brussels in 1929, but after that remained unheard until well after the Second. The source is the autobiographical novella by Dostoyevsky. At its center is a rebellious tutor to a feckless Russian family in the German gambling spa of "Roulettenburg." The tutor is neurotically obsessed with Polina, the ward of his employer, the General. She herself is equally psychologically complex, treating him with a flirtatious yet dominating cruelty. The General, deeply in debt to a louche French Marquis, is waiting for his rich grandmother to die (as is his fortune-hunting French mistress). The old lady turns up instead and proceeds to gamble her fortune largely away. The opera ends with the focus returned to the tutor Alexei, so besotted with Polina that he gambles his entire stake for her and, in an unbelievable series of coups, breaks the bank. He gives her money, which she accepts for a moment of sexual delight and then throws in his face and departs, leaving Alexei to dwell on his incredible luck—at the gaming tables.

Prokofiev, who wrote his own libretto, did not change the Dostoyevsky story, but in the cutting process the emotionally tangled milieu so characteristic of the author is somewhat muted, and the underlying grim humor of Russians abroad and at play is brought to the fore. This, of course, is entirely typical of the composer and his music, which is probably why the subject appealed to him. Prokofiev wisely deleted the lengthy denouement as Alexei sinks into the life of a gambling junkie.

Prokofiev claimed that he was writing a "declamatory" opera without arias or even tunes, and he succeeded. The music well matches the subject matter, and consists of gnomic cells heard and then discarded—almost anti-melodic but always driven and redolent of his youthful compositional energy. It is just the sort of music Gergiev dotes on and can transform into dramatic gold.

The short opera (a little over two hours' playing time) was given a taut, inventive production directed by Temur Chkheidze, with a basic, glittery set by George Tsypin. One felt throughout the guiding and unifying spirit of the conductor Gergiev. As the story becomes more unsettled, the production moved toward a sort of refined expressionism of movement and lighting (by James F. Ingalls), especially in the gambling scene itself. This brought into prominence a huge, movable lighted sculpture representing a roulette wheel, which overhung the stage until it descended, turned inside out, and became a sort of phantasmagoria of gambling in itself.

Of the well-matched ensemble Vladimir Galouzine as Alexei projected the requisite anguish and (as he says) Tartar impetuousness, while Olga Guryakova as Polina persuaded one that this difficult and contradictory character could really exist and be in some sense sympathetic. The cranky and domineering grandmother became a comic vignette in the hands of Elena Obraztsova, though the voice is a shadow of that which gave the Met such a thrill as Delilah and Amneris many seasons ago. The Met titles were, for this work especially, a blessing.

It is precisely this kind of finished and penetrating look at a minor but vital work that the Met should be producing to go along with the vocal galas of one sort and another, and the first-night audience seemed to agree.

—Patrick J. Smith

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The media

The accustomed perspective

by James Bowman

The journalistic and popular cultures draw ever nearer together, and what unites them is the imaginative flight—by now a milk-run—to the top of Mount Olympus from where they look down like gods upon the petty struggles of lesser beings and keen "Give Peace a Chance," the simple-minded anthem of their kind. "Lord, what fools these mortals be" it seems to the gentle and pacific spirits who have been the tutelary deities to our intellectuals and artists and those who wish to emulate them since the 1960s. Up until the end of the Cold War there was some natural check upon their good-hearted naïveté in the form of a palpable threat from a powerful enemy, but for the last decade the world has obliged our hippie moralists by looking (if you don't look too closely into its darker corners) like the kind of world where peace and happiness are to be had just by wishing for them.

Little wonder, then, that the recent detention by Chinese authorities of an American spy plane which had been forced to make a landing on Chinese soil brought out the worst qualities—which is to say sanctimoniousness and self-righteousness—of the American media. How easy the international crisis seemed to the editorialists of *The New York Times*, for example, who noted with spectacular but not untypical unhelpfulness:

> The aftermath of Sunday's midair collision of an American spy plane and a Chinese jet fighter is following a tired but dangerous cold-war script that is in neither country's interest. Common sense suggests that a decade after the end of the cold war, the United States and China, nations that are not enemies and that have a strong economic incentive to develop a productive relationship, ought to be able to find a different way of resolving an affair like this. The reflexive posturing of both sides has only hardened the dispute and pointed the way toward a serious deterioration in relations.

"That," says the *Times* in its one concession to the American position, "is especially true of the Chinese response." Even so, "President Bush's stern admonitions to China, while correctly emphasizing the need to return the Americans, could have the unintended effect of limiting the diplomatic flexibility that may be required to resolve the affair." Taking up its accustomed god-like perspective, the editorialist tells us that "A more constructive approach for both sides would emphasize fact-finding and a sharing of information about the incident. . . . The point of providing such information should not be to embarrass one another but to establish basic facts."

Doubtless this would be "a more constructive approach," if anybody had been disposed to take it. But as no one was, it was an observation of staggering banality, not to say stupidity. People *ought* to behave as if they were something better than two

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little boys fighting for dominance of a school playground, as the father of one of the hostages put it. How infuriating, then, that they don't! How infuriating, in the same way, that some people are poor, stupid, vicious, or ugly. But what is the point of continuing to respond to the fact that they are with the mere wish that they would not be? If everyone thought like editorial writers for the *Times* perhaps there would be no more wars and universal harmony and understanding. But everyone doesn't. More particularly, those devoted to the frustration and defeat of American power do not. And there, as Dr. Johnson would say, is an end on't.

Or so, if you are moderately practiced at observing the behavior of the nations of the world, you might think. But notice that pejorative use of the adjective "cold-war" in the *Times*'s editorial. Notice also "tired but dangerous." Also "script." From words like these wafts the musty smell of flower-power gone to seed. From beyond the grave, Harry Truman and Dean Acheson, not to mention Joe McCarthy, can still induce their successors needlessly to put the world at risk by following a "script" written for them over half a century ago by anti-Communists who just wanted to protect the profits of General Motors. Absent America's "confrontational" attitude, the Chinese, like the Soviets before them, would be as gentle and peace-loving as *New York Times* editorialists.

Talk about "reflexive posturing"! By now there must be a program on *The New York Times* computers to write editorials like this. But the editorialists' assumptions that they write not from America, or even from New York, but from Mount Olympus are reflected in news reporting as well. Thus the *Times*'s Erik Eckholm:

> As for the bumpy road of United States-China relations, well, there is no reason to think it will be easy. The two powers, one riding high around the globe and proud of its muscle, the other seeking a new status in Asia and the world but aware of its relative weakness, would have frictions in any case. Clashes like that over the spy plane are intensified by what the Chinese see as American arrogance, and by what Americans see as China's hyper-sensitivity.

Which is worse, arrogance or hyper-sensitivity? It's pretty clear where Eckholm, and the experts he cites, think the fault lies.

> The Chinese have already heard Mr. Bush, in his campaign, bash them as a "strategic competitor," threaten to sell the most advanced defensive systems to Taiwan and pledge to build national missile defenses that could negate China's small nuclear forces, noted Andrew Nathan, a political scientist at Columbia University. "So in the current crisis, for Chinese leaders to act like a doormat would be to send the wrong message," he said. "They don't want a major crisis, but they do want to use the occasion presented by this accident to remind the Bush administration that 'We're here, we're a major power, we are not to be treated like a second-rate country.'"

Nor is it only at *The New York Times* where it is a point of honor to "empathize" with the Chinese point of view. The "Outlook" section of *The Washington Post* offered the hospitality of its columns to Kurt M. Campbell, a deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asia and the Pacific in the Clinton administration, to lecture along similar lines:

> Imagine a Chinese reconnaissance plane cruising off the Atlantic seaboard, purposely setting off defense warning systems and monitoring the response. Imagine it colliding with an F-15 fighter that scrambled to intercept it, killing the American pilot. Imagine the damaged Chinese aircraft landing on Martha's Vineyard, startling natives and tourists alike. Would the United States let that plane fly right back to Beijing, nosy electronics intact?

Of course it is not enough just to put ourselves in the position of the Chinese.

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What would be the point of doing so unless the exercise were to point up America's mistakes? Thus Elisabeth Rosenthal in the *Times* again:

> China's leaders seemed initially eager to avoid an overly hostile confrontation at a time when China is about to enter the World Trade Organization and is competing to play host to the 2008 Olympics. But that hope seemed to vanish with today's escalating war of words, which seemed at least partly prompted by the widespread feeling here, in and out of government, that President Bush was dismissive of China's concerns.

Like the assumption that hostile words and acts between nations must be caused by unreconstructed cold warriors in the American government, the assumption that foreign sabre-rattling of any kind must have been provoked by the U.S. is a legacy of the 1960s anti-Vietnam War movement, whose victories have by now become legendary, especially among the advocates of a self-consciously internationalist journalistic culture. That culture has little capacity to resist what Jeane Kirkpatrick called the "blame-America-first" syndrome, since blaming America is a pledge of bona fides, a handshake gesture designed to demonstrate that one is not some patriotic troglodyte incapable of imaginative sympathy with truculent non-Americans wherever in the world they may be.

It was to be sure a bit awkward that, in the case of an unarmed American aircraft knocked out of the sky at great risk to the lives of twenty-four Americans by a recklessly aggressive Chinese military jet in international airspace, it wasn't always easy to see what America could be blamed for. But that didn't stop people from trying, and Ms. Rosenthal's belief that President Bush had been peremptory and abrasive in demanding the aircraft's return was widely shared. CBS's reporter in Beijing, Barry Petersen, claimed in an "exclusive" report that the Chinese had been all set to return the plane and its crew when "strong words from the U.S. President stunned China's President Jiang Zemin, forcing him to up the ante" by demanding an apology.

Petersen would hardly have been so credulous about a "well-placed" source in the American government—unless it had similarly confirmed an already existing prejudice about who should get the blame. Without the benefit of even an ill-placed Chinese source, Anthony Lewis wrote in the *Times*:

> There is an iron law of incidents like the collision of Chinese and American aircraft last weekend: If the governments concerned do not settle the matter quickly, hard-line extremists on both sides will gain.
>
> By his handling of the aircraft incident, George W. Bush allowed that iron law to take hold. He was needlessly provocative at first. He and his aides missed the early opportunity to limit the confrontation.

He goes on to add:

> In this as in other such incidents, it may never be clear who was to blame. U.S. sources have insisted that the Chinese fighter planes must have been at fault, because they are so much nimbler than our "lumbering" surveillance plane. But later reports indicated that one of the fighters was flying just below it when the U.S. plane suddenly banked to the left and down.

The "later reports" referred to here are the Chinese government's claims about what happened, which were dismissed by almost all other commentators as wildly implausible at the time they were made and as complete fabrications when the American flight crew was eventually returned home. But of course such "reports" fit with Lewis's presumption that America must be in the wrong, even when he cannot avoid noticing that China is not anyone's idea of a model liberal democracy. "There is ample reason to criticize China's Communist government" for its human rights abuses, he dutifully reports. But Bush's actions have only strengthened the hand of the "hard-liners"

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in the Chinese government and armed forces. Editorially, too, the Times found "more worrisome" even than "Beijing's prickliness over a formal apology" what the incident revealed "about military influence over Beijing's decision-making."

Ah, there you have it. The true legacy of the 1960s—more even than "blame America first"—is *cherchez le soldat*. Wherever mischief is afoot, some "hard-line," "right-wing," "extremist," or "militarist" is sure to be responsible, either on our side or on theirs, or (most likely) both. Barry Petersen, our man in the inner councils of the Chinese government reported that "the [Chinese] military is especially angry with tough-talking policies from the Bush administration"—tough-talking policies such as asking for our airplane and crew back, which Peter Jennings of ABC characterized as a policy of being "very militant rhetorically with the Chinese government." Terry Moran, also of ABC, was particularly worried that "some Republicans in Congress are growing increasingly belligerent" while Ted Koppel even-handedly reported that "over there they also have their conservatives."

By "conservatives," of course, he means those alleged tough-talkers on both sides who may be presumed to have been eager to "escalate" the rhetorical strife, if possible to the point of open hostilities. This view of the situation eventually made it easier for the Olympians of the editorial pages finally to take a side. America was to be preferred to China because our tough-talkers turned out to be less tough than their Chinese counterparts. Or so it might have appeared to someone reading *The Washington Post*'s editorial which noted that

> It is probable, as numerous China watchers have said, that President Jiang Zemin's government is divided over whether to settle or escalate. After all, the Republican Party also has its hard-liners who would like to cut off China's trading privileges with the United States, sell sophisticated new weapons to Taiwan, or block the selection of Beijing for the 2008 Olympics. But Mr. Bush, unlike Mr. Jiang, has gone out of his way to quiet militant voices in the past few days.

For all the emphasis placed on these "militant voices" by the media they were in oddly short supply on both sides—unless you count Bill Kristol and Robert Kagan of *The Weekly Standard*, who were roundly denounced by the administration for claiming to regard its emollient expression of "regret" for the loss of the Chinese pilot, Wang Wei, as "a national humiliation." But the existence could be presumed of those who, behind the scenes, were urging their respective governments on to ever-greater belligerence. So when the affair came to a satisfactory conclusion with the return of our flyers, the congratulations to President Bush generally supposed that his principal victory had been won over "the hardliners in his own party," as Geraldo Rivera called them.

Yet for all anyone knows, these "hardliners" were as much a fabrication as the Marine officer portrayed by Alec Baldwin in the "Saturday Night Live" sketch about the incident. Baldwin, well-known for having promised to leave the country if Bush won the election—he now says that this was all a misunderstanding—obviously relished the part of this fictitious Marine who tried to persuade the rest of the American aircrew to join him in taking on the entire Chinese armed forces. Where did this guy come from but the post-Vietnam folk-memory by which everyone knows—at least everyone who watches "Saturday Night Live"—that suicidal stupidity is a quality highly valued by the American military establishment in its gung-ho soldiers? To such people national suicide would be even better. Thus *Thirteen Days*, the recent film about the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, made the bad guys neither Russian nor Cuban but the crazy generals and admirals in the Pentagon who would certainly have started a nuclear war had they not been restrained by the wisdom and prudence of Jack Kennedy.

So it is that what begins as the self-conscious sophistication of the newsman in

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seeking imaginatively to transcend merely local or national loyalties and take the global view often ends in another sort of simple-mindedness—an easy willingness to assume that those in power who show a greater attachment to those loyalties must be either knaves or fools, and that those whom they would make enemies must be merely misunderstood. How easy it is even to get out of a scrape like this one if only you're willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the other side. This is what lay behind Jesse Jackson's offer of a diplomatic intervention. His own recent experience of apologizing (for a sexual impropriety) seemed to have taught him how easy and painless the process was. His subsequent and loudly proclaimed withdrawal from public life lasted only a week.

Nor was he the only one to wonder what was the big deal about a little apology. "Terry, I know the White House says the Navy jet did nothing wrong and there's no reason to apologize," said Peter Jennings to Terry Moran. "But some Americans say if an apology would free the Navy crew, why not?" Similar questions were asked by Bob Schieffer and Sam Donaldson in examples gathered by the Media Research Center, while Geraldo Rivera asked a guest who had bravely said that the U.S. was in the right in the matter: "Does that really matter? Right or wrong?" In other contexts, even Geraldo Rivera has shown signs that he thinks the question of right or wrong really *does* matter, as have the others who hinted at a willingness to apologize where no apology was due. But the question of right or wrong looks a little different from God's point of view.

Here, for instance, is how the matter was put by "a State Department official with long experience in Asia" quoted by Jane Perlez and David E. Sanger in *The New York Times*: "We run the risk here of this becoming a strutting contest. That's what we've got to avoid." Neither the official nor *The New York Times* tells us *why* we've got to avoid that, or how it is to be avoided. The proposition had only to be stated to be accepted as true. Some such consideration must also have been in the back of the minds of Peter Jennings and Bob Schieffer and Sam Donaldson and Geraldo Rivera and all those who take seriously the moral imperative of journalistic statelessness. All are pre-emptively shamed by the implied *argumentum ad dignitatem* that says that *we* aren't going to be party to anything as petty as a "strutting contest."

The father of one of the airmen who compared the U.S. and China to two schoolboys trying to establish dominance over a playground was making a similar point. Surely international affairs must concern themselves with more high-minded matters than that? And yet human history from earliest times up until the day before yesterday suggests that international affairs are always and inevitably concerned with which schoolboy is to dominate the playground. We might prefer that it were not so, but it is so. Those who adopt the Olympian perspective always assume, somehow, that there is some place *off* the playground of this world where the question of who is the dominant schoolboy does not matter. But this is even less true of the world than it is of the playground.

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Fiction chronicle

Blurring the borders

by Brooke Allen

Less flashy than her compatriots and contemporaries Martin Amis and Julian Barnes, Pat Barker has, over the last couple of decades, been quietly building up a body of work that more than holds its own against theirs or that of any other writer of her generation. Her *Regeneration* trilogy, dealing with the First World War, is one of the most powerful pieces of fiction in recent years; its brilliant last volume, *The Ghost Road*, was awarded the Booker Prize. Her last novel *Another World* (1998) was an extraordinarily moving exploration of hatred and love between siblings.

In her new book *Border Crossing*,[1] Barker continues to probe many of the themes and questions she raised in *Another World*. Is anyone and everyone capable of committing an evil act? (The answer would seem to be yes.) Does an evil act make an evil person? Should an ordinary person, neither less nor more evil than others, be compelled to pay forever for the wrong committed in a moment? Why do some of us kill and others not—is it a matter of character, or might it simply be a matter of chance, or luck?

Such questions are urgent as we confront the current spate of school shootings and other killings by children with inadequate parental supervision and ready access to firearms. The get-tough attitude these tragedies have engendered has caused lawmakers to bypass the traditional route of juvenile or family court in favor of making young killers stand trial as adults. But in the recent case of a twelve-year-old who—accidentally, according to family members—killed a smaller child, even the toughest were shaken at the sight, on television and in the newspapers, of the killer's heartbreakingly childish face. Is he, on the basis of this one act, an irredeemable human being? Should he be tried as an adult, and be liable for adult punishment? Is it necessary, or desirable, to have him rot in prison for the next fifty years? These are decisions that our society appears philosophically unready to make; each time one of these atrocities takes place the rules are called into question all over again.

Furthermore, and on a more frightening and challenging level, is it possible that in fact many children would kill given the right combination of circumstances? Many children occasionally wish to kill their siblings; some even make feeble attempts to do so. For the most part they—and their unwitting victims—are lucky enough to have adults intervene in time. Not everyone is so fortunate.

Border Crossing addresses these questions with all of Barker's usual delicacy and straightforward emotionalism. The novel is set in the industrial city of Newcastle, in England. Tom Seymour, a clinical psychologist, has come to a rather grim turning point in his life. His marriage is coming to

1 *Border Crossing*, by Pat Barker; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 215 pages, $22.

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an end, having finally been broken by the stress of a long, and fruitless, attempt to conceive. "If only getting pregnant hadn't become such an obsession," he thinks. "She reminded him of one of those female fish that, in times of environmental hardship, dispense with the male sex altogether and carry his gonads in a purse on their sides."

Though he is disturbed by the separation, it's clear that he doesn't much love Lauren any more. It is not she herself he will miss, so much as another presence in the house. His dread of his impending solitude combines with an uneasy realization that he is approaching forty and, after spending years dealing with disturbed and abused children, he is getting emotionally cold, letting his necessary professional detachment turn into a frighteningly automatic chill.

> He'd learnt early, in his first few months of practice, that those who take the misery home with them burn out and end up no use to anybody. He'd learnt to value detachment: the clinician's splinter of ice in the heart.

As he and Lauren stroll along the waterfront one day, they see a young man swallow a bottle of pills and throw himself into the ice-cold water. Tom jumps to his rescue, managing to fish him out in time for him to be revived in the hospital. The would-be suicide turns out, by coincidence—or is it really a coincidence?—to be a figure from his past: Danny Miller, at whose trial for murder thirteen years earlier Tom had served as an expert witness.

It had been Tom's unenviable responsibility to decide whether Danny, ten years old at the time that he impulsively murdered an elderly neighbor, was mentally and morally mature enough to be tried as an adult.

> Could Danny distinguish between fantasy and reality? Did he understand that killing was wrong? Did he understand that death is a permanent state? Was he, in short, capable of standing trial, on a charge of murder, in an adult court?

Tom had answered yes to every question. The criteria were clear enough. But were they the right criteria?

Now Tom has a chance to find out, for Danny asks him to spend some time talking with him, to help him understand his past and his future. More fortunate than some, Danny had been sent immediately after his trial to a special school, where he excelled academically and was urged, he now says, to put "the past behind me. Just forget it. And that was that. . . . I tried to do it." Now, armed with a new name and identity and an attentive probation officer, he has rejoined the world, rather nervously.

Tom uneasily agrees to honor Danny's request. Danny is, to all appearances, a successful product of the system, startlingly attractive and intelligent; he is also clearly damaged and more than a little antagonistic toward Tom, whom he had trusted and who, he felt, betrayed him. As they explore the events of thirteen years before, Tom, who had long suppressed any doubts about his decisive testimony, is obliged to re-examine whatever assumptions he then made.

The small murderer was no sociopath; he had been provided with a moral framework and knew that killing was wrong. His childhood, lived under the shadow of a violent and confused father, was not a happy one, but as he himself points out he was certainly not an "abused child" in the accepted sense of the word: "I wasn't neglected, sexually abused, starved, tortured, left on my own morning, noon, and night, scalded, burnt. . . . All of which happens." As for the murder itself, it was senseless, the classic *acte gratuite*. "I don't know why I killed her," Danny says. "I didn't know then, and I don't know now. And I don't know how to live with it."

Tom is unable to provide an answer; he begins to suspect that violence, all violence, is more random than he had believed, and he remembers, with unease, an incident from his own childhood. He and his friend Jeff had been encumbered for the day with an unwelcome younger boy, Neal, a bespectacled, vulnerable four-year-old. When

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Neal got mired in a shallow pond, the older boys began to throw stones at him. "Why did they do it?," the adult Tom wonders. "Because they were frightened, because they shouldn't have been there at all, because he was a problem they couldn't solve, because neither could be the first to back down."

A man in a passing bus glanced up and saw the scene, and, fortunately for all three children, he intervened. Might Tom and Jeff have gone on to hurt Neal, even kill him? Tom knows that it's possible. What disturbs him is not only his early behavior, but how little responsibility he now feels for the act.

> If somebody had asked him about that afternoon, he'd have said something like "Kids can be very cruel." Not "I was very cruel." . . . In spite of the connecting thread of memory, the person who'd done that was not sufficiently like his present self for him to feel guilt.

The connection with Danny—with Danny then and now—is inescapable. Which of them is the more "evil," and is evil a valid concept in such cases? Tom himself admits that he no longer believes in evil in the metaphysical sense, but only as a useful way of classifying certain types of behavior. Another question, and the most troubling one to Danny, is, can people change? Danny's own experience has taught him that

> all sorts of people whose jobs actually depend on a belief that people can change, social workers, probation officers, clinical psychologists . . . psychiatrists, don't really believe it at all.

Pat Barker has never been even a slightly didactic author. She provides no answers to the many questions raised in the book; her purpose is to open people's minds to potentially contradictory ideas, not to score cheap, easy, or politically classifiable points. Danny is neither a villain nor a victim but a complicated person, in equal parts attractive and repellent. How much of his adult character is due to the impact of his early experiences? Is he, as some people believe, still a dangerous person? What implications does Danny's life hold for Tom's own? While not as heartbreaking as some of Barker's earlier novels, *Border Crossing* is emotionally affecting and sophisticated, and poses, as well, a tormenting and almost insoluble philosophical challenge.

Can people change? In some cases the answer is yes, to a frightening degree. In *Beloved Stranger*[2] the Irish writer Clare Boylan has provided a fictionalized account of her own father's horrifying, and at times grotesquely comical, descent into madness.

Dick and Lily Butler are a long-married couple living in a quiet Dublin neighborhood; they are ordinary, middle-class, rather dowdy, and entirely habit-bound. Dick was volatile during his youth, but now, as an old man, has become subdued; Lily, like so many women of her pre-war generation, looks at her not-always-satisfactory marriage as an inevitable cross to bear. Nevertheless, she loves her husband. A woman, she says,

> is given a mate in order to look after his salvation. You're given a spoilt son and you turn him into a human being. You can't do it by confrontation. That way a marriage breaks up. You have to do it by example. Sooner or later he gets affected by goodness. It's a matter of habit.

Then, with a savage suddenness, the seventy-odd-year-old Dick goes mad. He begins giving away large sums of money, opens all the windows to let in the icy wind; little by little, he becomes physically threatening, brandishing a gun and terrifying his wife. He rants at length.

> Once, I was a person to be reckoned with. . . . A figure, if I may say so, of considerable authority. Yes, Mr. Butler. No, Mr. Butler. Kiss-my-arse, Mr. Butler. I ruled without. Ruled within. My servants called me Lord . . . and Master.

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2 *Beloved Stranger*, by Clare Boylan; Counterpoint, 309 pages, $24.

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Much of it sounds mad, but as Lily quickly realizes, he is speaking from his heart: everything he says makes sense within its own, magnified terms.

Lily calls in their daughter, Ruth, a formidable, forty-year-old architect about as different from her parents as it's possible to be:

> a fine-figured woman, still young, but with a kind of encompassing grimness, a heaviness of body that seemed to issue from the heart. . . . Having tried and failed to win [her father's] love when she was a little girl, she demonstrated her indifference to him by destroying what he might come to value. She knew he liked beauty and delicacy in women. It was what he loved in Ma.

But the efficient and hard-bitten Ruth turns out to be as vulnerable as her mother. As Dick's behavior becomes more violent and bizarre, the two women call in a young psychiatrist, who diagnoses bipolar disorder—manic depression—and eventually has Dick hospitalized. Predictably Dick, like many bipolar patients, does not cooperate in his treatment and manages to avoid taking his lithium and to disrupt the family repeatedly, sometimes in a farcical manner.

Beloved Stranger might seem on a superficial reading to be a book about madness; in reality it is a book about marriage and family, and the function of the mania is simply to underscore, intensify, the patterns that have been there all along. The illness reveals Dick's true nature without distorting it; it is as though, Ruth notices, he has been given a "character-enhancing drug," and the countless unspoken problems are thrown into sudden and disconcerting relief.

The product of a pre-feminist age, Lily now immerses herself in feminist literature not in order to change her life but to understand it. She realizes that if she had followed her own instincts she would not have married Dick Butler, and she knows, too, that the demands he made on her have all but annihilated her own identity. "I've always listened to him, even when he didn't make any sense," she tells Ruth. "That's what wives of my generation did. We were brought up to respect men." And years of such ritual respect have turned Lily into the near-automaton that other, more modern women, see

> performing her anxious dance. Bow to the right, bow to the left, see to Ruth, deal with Pa. The whispered warnings, the ritual appeasement, the inevitable consequences.

Lily, though, is stronger and more complicated than she appears to be, largely because of her intelligence and self-awareness. Marriage is a prison, yes, and so is housekeeping. Over the years, she knows,

> the face of marriage became her own face, feeding off her life and energy until she was old and used up and calmed down, and then whatever remained of the people she and Dick had been or might have been were content just to prop one another up, until.

But when she speaks of her love for Dick, it is more than a conventional platitude. The love is real and painful. It is Ruth's exclusion from this palpable love and dependence that has frightened her away from a family life of her own.

The Independent called *Beloved Stranger* "authentic Lear-on-the-heath stuff," and it is, I think, a good description. Dick's mania, though a physical illness, makes peculiar sense within the context of his life and his impending death: in effect he is, as his psychiatrist points out, raging against the dying of the light. The chaos he has wrought in his family is not, in the end, entirely destructive. In his mad rantings Ruth discovers that he has loved her after all, and she is freed to love others in her turn. And at other moments Dick displays a laser-like lucidity that cuts through fifty years of repression and prevarication. *Beloved Stranger* ought to make depressing reading; instead, it offers humor, enlightenment, and true consolation.

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Michael Dibdin is an Englishman currently living in America, known so far purely as a writer of murder mysteries. *Thanksgiving*[3] marks a departure: while it draws on certain elements of the mystery genre, such as suspense, dark atmospherics, and artfully dropped clues, it is in fact a straightforward novel dealing with a classic fictional subject: grief.

The narrator, Anthony, is a British journalist living in the United States. His American wife, Lucy, has just died in a shocking and senseless manner, and he is on the verge of a breakdown. It was a happy and companionable marriage contracted in middle age; both of them had been married before, and Lucy had had two children, now grown, by her first husband.

In his groping attempt to understand his loss, Anthony becomes obsessed with tracking down Lucy's first husband, Darryl Bob Allen. Although Lucy had had as little as possible to do with Darryl Bob for many years, Anthony admits to resenting him:

> Not so much, as he claimed, because he'd known Lucy when she was younger, but because he was the father of her children. . . . All our love and tenderness and humor was so much piss in the wind. We'd "done the deed," but they'd mated. Nothing would ever change that.

With a gun in his pocket but no firm plans to use it, Anthony tracks Darryl Bob down to the Nevada desert and confronts him in his run-down trailer. The superbly portrayed Darryl Bob is a real horror, a corrupt and conniving drunk who possesses a certain incongruous charm and intelligence—enough, at any rate, to have once persuaded the winsome Lucy to marry him. Anthony doesn't use his gun; instead, he ends up selling it to Darryl Bob. But when Darryl Bob is subsequently found dead it is he who becomes the prime suspect. Panicked, Anthony retreats to France and holes up at his parents' empty, isolated Provençal house.

He is haunted emotionally by Lucy, and, at least in his own mind, he is haunted by her physically as well. With a fine psychological ambiguity that harks back to James's *Turn of the Screw*, Dibdin keeps the reader uncertain whether the haunting is real or purely in Anthony's imagination. Anthony even begins to fear he will be driven to his death, as Darryl Bob was.

Help comes to Anthony in an odd form. During her life Lucy had worried about her daughter Claire, now separated from her own husband and living alone with her small son. Anthony had come onto the scene too late, and had been too much wrapped up in Lucy, to serve as much of a father figure to Claire. Now, when Claire asks whether she and her child can spend Thanksgiving with him in his lonely farmhouse, he hesitates, loath to interrupt his private grieving. He finally, reluctantly, agrees to the visit. It turns out, in ways he would never have expected, to mark the beginning of his rehabilitation and his return to life.

The classic suspense novel has always attracted some of Britain's finest writers: John Le Carré and Ruth Rendell, to name two, write as well as anyone in England today. At their best they have blurred the borders between genre fiction and literary fiction, while some top-notch literary authors, like Graham Greene, have done the same thing from the other side of the fence. Dibdin, Barker, and Boylan have joined this tradition, using elements of the mystery novel to construct pieces of fiction that are not essentially mystery stories at all; the resulting cross-fertilization has proved fruitful for all three.

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3 *Thanksgiving*, by Michael Dibdin; Pantheon, 182 pages, $20.

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Books

Great is this truth

by David Pryce-Jones

An underworld exists of people who believe that we are deceived about the nature of much recent history in general and the Second World War in particular. To them, Hitler was a great man and Churchill was evil. To bypass the objection that Hitler launched not only war but also mass murder on a continental scale, these people have to deny that there ever was a Holocaust, that nothing much happened to the Jews in the war, or if it did then they deserved it and more. They see themselves as "revisionists," which is a fancy way of saying that they are defying the usual processes of fact-finding and reasoning whereby the rest of us know our history.

Plenty of academics and critics in other fields today argue that there is no such thing as truth, and every assertion of objective knowledge is therefore in need of deconstruction. It follows that there are no moral absolutes or intellectual standards. That is the tide which carries within it these "revisionists" and Holocaust deniers. Their cause of postwar Nazism and anti-Semitism can only be pursued through their specific variety of deconstruction, involving the denial of some facts and the invention of others. So they have spawned a variety of institutions and associations, such as the misleadingly named Institute for Historical Review in California. The common purpose is to degrade everybody else's facts as prejudices and to glorify their own prejudices as facts.

In this underworld, David Irving has long been an acknowledged star, earning himself a wide reputation as "controversial," that euphemism for anything and everything which goes against common sense, reason, and humanity. He is familiar with German, has read in the archives, interviewed a good many Nazis, and written some thirty books. His admiration for Hitler and Nazism, his Jew-baiting, his detestation of Churchill have left behind him a persistent trail of outrage. Nobody has tried harder or with more success to deconstruct facts on these topics and to replace them with his personal animosities and prejudices. He has argued that the British bombing of Dresden in 1945 was a war crime comparable to any committed by the Germans. He libelled a British naval officer about his conduct during an Atlantic convoy (and had to pay damages). He accused Churchill of ordering the destruction of an aircraft flying the Polish General Sikorski home from Gibraltar in 1943 (with the death of all on board, including Victor Cazalet, a close friend of Churchill's and a fellow Conservative Member of Parliament). The Hungarian uprising of 1956 was in his view a Jewish conspiracy, and as such the Soviets were right to suppress it.

Hitler, Irving has maintained, was neither aware of the Holocaust until about 1943, nor responsible for it. If anyone, Goebbels was to blame. Irving concedes that rogue S.S. men killed some Jews, but the majority had died of disease and starvation. To a woman who told him to his face that her

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grandparents had died in Auschwitz, he replied, "You can be comforted in the knowledge that they most likely died of typhus, like Anne Frank." In his opinion, Auschwitz had no gas chambers, there was no systematic mass murder, and the Jews themselves put about this tale in order to receive financial compensation to which they had no right. To an audience of sympathetic listeners in Canada in 1990, he hit upon the acronym ASSHOLS, standing for "The Auschwitz Survivors, Survivors of the Holocaust, and Other Liars."

Confronted with his work, writers who ought to have known better have bent over backwards to find merit in it. In tones of dismay, Richard J. Evans, in his new book, *Lying About Hitler*,[1] quotes Michael Howard, formerly Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, declaring that Irving was "at his best as a professional historian demanding documentary proof for popularly-held beliefs"—the very opposite of Irving's procedure. Or again Gordon A. Craig, who asserted that Irving "knows more about National Socialism than most professional scholars in the field," following this up with the preposterous (and condescending) sentence, "It is always difficult for the non-historian to remember that there is nothing absolute about historical truth." Another prolific writer on military affairs, John Keegan, believes that Irving has "many of the qualities of the most creative historians." If these men were indeed familiar with Irving's sources, plainly none of them had taken the trouble to verify Irving's use or abuse of them. Slapdash opinions of this kind reflect the decline of standards in historiography and book reviewing.

Honorable exceptions of course exist. The authoritative Martin Broszat showed how Irving had manipulated documents to build a case. Peter Hoffmann, no less authoritative an historian, called him "a great obfuscator." Wolfgang Benz dismissed such new evidence as Irving uncovered as coming from "the perspective of the keyhole." In the United States, John Lukacs pointed out the unreliability of Irving's documentation, and in a long review Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., concluded that Irving's research was "pretentious twaddle."

There the matter might have rested, with Irving always "controversial," if Deborah Lipstadt had not published in 1993 her book *Denying the Holocaust*. Exposing the pullulating underworld of Hitler admirers and anti-Semites, she singled out Irving as one of the leading falsifiers of the history of the Nazis. His real political agenda was clearly to exonerate Hitler and Nazism, and denial of the Holocaust was one of the chief means to that end. Irving duly sued for libel, and the case came to court in 2000 in London.

British libel laws are admitted on all sides to be antiquated and unfair, weighted towards the plaintiff. The defendants, Deborah Lipstadt and her publishers Penguin Books, had to establish justification, namely that the charges were true and that Irving was indeed a Holocaust denier and Hitler admirer, as stated in the book. Irving may have thought that this was virtually unprovable, in which event he could expect considerable damages. There is also a quaint British precedent for a judgment of guilty but with damages placed at a farthing, but even that would have done wonders for Irving and Holocaust denial. Finally, he may have calculated that the publicity, national and international, would be great enough to cancel any damage done to him.

Pleading justification, the defense lawyers called on expert witnesses, and among these were Robert Jan Van Pelt, the historian of Auschwitz, and Christopher Browning, who has made a special study of Nazi killers. But Richard J. Evans, Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, had the most important task of all, which was to compare the original sources and documentation to the uses which Irving had put them. With the help of research assistants, he wrote a seven-hundred-page report, to

1 *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust and the David Irving Trial*, by Richard J. Evans; Basic Books, 336 pages, $27.

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be presented to the judge, Charles Gray, who would study it at leisure.

To Irving's open delight, the trial received daily coverage in the press in several countries. In its opening stages, a number of journalists and commentators expressed a fear that the Holocaust itself might be on trial, and a courtroom was not the appropriate place to settle an issue of historical truth. By mutual consent, as the law allows, there was no jury, and everything therefore turned on what Mr. Justice Gray made of the expert witnesses and their evidence. For whatever reason, Irving chose to conduct his case himself, as "a litigant in person" in the lawyer's phrase.

The court itself was unremarkable and crowded. My seat was almost directly behind Irving. He proved to be physically large, a little ungainly but a definite presence, with an energetic brutality about him. He wore a dark three-piece pinstripe suit, somewhat crumpled. The type was familiar: the man endlessly articulating the grievance that consumes him, the overbearing member of the clubhouse, the middle manager with no time for the lesser fry on the staff, the self-professed victim of aliens and ill-wishers. Yes, the Jews ganged up on him, there was indeed a Jewish conspiracy, and he referred repeatedly to its power and its gold. Christopher Browning, for example, had once published an essay in Israel, and no doubt had been paid for it.

John Keegan and the eminent Professor Donald Cameron Watt of the London School of Economics (once co-editor of a book with Irving) were two expert witnesses who had refused to appear for Irving, but were served with a subpoena by him obliging them to do so. Neither could be remotely considered sympathetic to Nazism, and both criticized Irving's presentation of Hitler and the Holocaust. At the same time, they praised his skills as an historian. "Depressing" is the mild word that Evans reserves for these examples of *trahison des clercs*, and there seems no good explanation of it. (Even more inexplicably, Keegan was later to write an article in which he defended Irving as "never dull," in contrast to Deborah Lipstadt, whose insistence on telling the truth about the Holocaust he characterized as "self-righteously politically correct.") Listening to the exchanges between Irving and the expert witnesses, Mr. Justice Gray's expression gave nothing away. Once he advised, "If I may say so, Mr. Irving, we must do better than that," but more gently and frequently it was, "Mr. Irving, please help me with this." Whether by accident or design, Irving was to repay him at a critical point by addressing him as "Mein Führer."

Evans by contrast is physically slight, modest, and quiet-spoken. In the witness box, he evidently shrank from Irving and reveals now that he deliberately avoided eye contact. The repeated thrust of his argument was that Irving could not be considered an historian in any sense of the word, but had shown himself a mere propagandist for Nazism and anti-Semitism. In reply, Irving read out the tributes which historians had so heedlessly proferred.

Lying about Hitler is a selection of the more significant chapters from Evans's seven-hundred-page document. Simple, elegant, and unemotional in style, it is devastating, a task of demolition so complete that it is hard to think of anything comparable. Irving's apology for Hitler and Nazism is shown to be based on selective quotation, misrepresentation, reversal of meaning, false translation, and sometimes outright fabrication. He has resorted habitually to double standards, crediting or refashioning evidence that suited his case, while denigrating and dismissing evidence that did not.

For example, at the time of the "beer hall putsch" of 1923, some of Hitler's Brownshirts had removed their party badges before looting Jewish shops. A policeman by the name of Hofmann testified to this. Hitler disciplined them for it, on the grounds that looting with party badges on was a political act, but without party badges it became a criminal act. Irving inverted Hofmann's words to pretend that Hitler was

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actually protecting Jews. At the time of *Kristallnacht*, the Nazi pogrom in 1938, a Nazi propagandist and senior policeman, Kurt Daluege, claimed that in one year in Berlin there had been 31,000 cases of fraud, reduced to 18,000 the next year, with "a considerable part" of the perpetrators being Jewish. By implication, Jewish fraud was coming under control. In Irving's account, however, this became "no fewer than 31,000 cases of fraud, mainly insurance swindles, would be committed by Jews."

In fact Daluege nowhere claimed that all 31,000 were Jews, nor did he mention insurance swindles. Had Irving checked the official statistics, as Evans did, he would further have learned that the actual number convicted of insurance fraud in the relevant year was just seventy-four, comprising Jews and non-Jews. According to Irving, Hitler on various occasions intervened to mitigate the fate of the Jews, but Evans establishes that all such claims involve blatant manipulation and deliberate misreading of the record. The bombing of Dresden left about 25,000 dead, according to those German officials in charge of the city at the time, and Irving simply inflated the figure with an extra nought. And so on and on and on, in this studious unpicking of lies and subterfuges.

Towards the end of the Eighties, it appears from Evans, Irving reached some sort of a turning point, afterwards directing all his efforts to anti-Semitism and the obsessive defense of Hitler. He gravitated full-time to the underworld of like-minded people, speechifying often to the Institute for Historical Review and to drawing attention to himself through wilder and wilder pronouncements as though daring the authorities in one country after another to take action against him. No doubt he came to believe what he was spouting, for he is indisputably the author of his own fate. He had laid a simple trap for himself. Confronted by an expert witness of the calibre of Evans, he had to choose between admitting to professional incompetence or to Nazi sympathies and Holocaust denial. Either way, he ran slap into the folly of bringing the case against Deborah Lipstadt. Cornered by the facts, his body shook and his hard face flushed red with arrogance and anger. His only remaining escape route was to present himself as a patriot at bay in the toils of a giant conspiracy against him. But how could it be patriotic to admire and exculpate Hitler and revile Churchill because he "fought the war five years longer than was necessary"? That remains a mystery central to this man.

In his lengthy verdict, Mr. Justice Gray was forthright and unsparing. The evidence provided by Evans undoubtedly had its due influence on him. He concluded without any qualifications that Irving has a political agenda that "disposes him, where he deems it necessary, to manipulate the historical record"; that thereby he "has portrayed Hitler in an unwarrantedly favorable light"; and finally that "his words are directed against Jews, either individually or collectively, in the sense that they are by turns hostile, critical, offensive and derisory." Irving has nowhere to turn to, nowhere to hide. In the eyes of the Nazified underworld, his conduct was so wrong and cowardly that he can no longer be considered a true "revisionist." That is a comic bonus. Everywhere else, his discrediting is now permanent, and it brings with it a gain altogether unexpected and extraordinary. At a time of cultural disarray and widespread moral doubts, this case marks a triumph for the concept of historical truth as something knowable through the careful study of facts and the application of reason. And great is this truth, and it shall prevail.

Of Osberts and Evelyns

Anthony Powell To Keep the Ball Rolling. The University of Chicago Press, 456 pages, $27.50

reviewed by Ben Downing

"I don't like to meddle in my private affairs," Karl Kraus once quipped, and his aphorism

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would have made a perfect epigraph to this book. For few memoirists have been less impatient to plumb their own depths than Anthony Powell. When, for example, his first child is born, Powell confides in us, "I found that becoming a father had a profound effect on the manner in which one looked at the world"—and not a word more on the subject. Note how, by sentence's end, even the pronoun has withdrawn into impersonality.

To Keep the Ball Rolling—an abridged and revised edition of the four autobiographical volumes that Powell (1905–2000) published between 1976 and 1982, and which now appears for the first time in this country—does not recount a career of any great outward drama. Eton, then Oxford; a stint in publishing, another in screenwriting, a third as literary editor of *Punch*; a more or less even flow of increasingly acclaimed novels; a bit of unadventurous travel now and then; and, dullest of all, if rather shocking in view of his obsession with conjugal misery and divorce, a single happy marriage: Powell's life was hardly more tumultuous or exciting than that of Wallace Stevens.

A third letdown awaits devotees of Powell's twelve-volume masterpiece, *A Dance to the Music of Time*, whose characters tend to stir in readers an almost prurient curiosity about their real-life models. Is Sillery based on Maurice Bowra, as has often been conjectured? Powell doesn't say. Widmerpool, that sublime toad, isn't even mentioned. Almost grudgingly, Powell allows that the composer Moreland harbors elements of Constant Lambert, and that the flamboyant writer X. Trapnel is a dead ringer for Julian Maclaren-Ross (who, as a friend and fellow *Dance*-enthusiast wryly remarked, is now more famous for having inspired Trapnel than in his own right). "The less novelists descant on their own works the better," Powell opines, and in all fairness he can't be faulted for this reticence. But still. Those looking to play the *à clef* game are better directed to the Anthony Powell website, which boasts pages of gossip about who's who in *Dance*.

I might add that *To Keep the Ball Rolling* is rather indifferently written, full of lazy segues and tepid formulations, and that it seems prompted by nothing stronger than a vague sense that an English man of letters, having reached a certain age and distinction, should, after all, produce his memoirs.

And yet the book, for all its shortcomings, has just enough of Powell's singular élan to scrape by. One reads it not for a deep view into the soul of its creator, but for telling, sometimes hilarious glimpses of his contemporaries. From Orwell to Muggeridge, Compton-Burnett to Kingsley Amis, Powell knew nearly everyone worth knowing, and his anecdotes do not disappoint.

Here's one set at the notorious Hypocrites Club:

> Evelyn Waugh (intermittently a prominent Hypocrites member, although excluded at this period for having smashed up a good deal of the Club's furniture with the heavy stick he always carried) had been served with a drink one evening just before closing time.
>
> "But, Whitman, I told you, when you asked, that I did *not* want another drink."
>
> "I thought you were joking, sir."

Another, from later in life, concerns his cartoonist friend Osbert Lancaster:

> Osbert Sitwell had at first resented that another Osbert should have entered his *monde*. In due course Sitwell and Lancaster had become friends, so that when Osbert Burdett, a man of letters of a somewhat older vintage who wrote of the Nineties, passed away in the 1930s they lunched *à deux* to celebrate being left as the sole Osberts (now, alas, reduced to one) in the field.

And this one, about the Beast of Ravello, comes courtesy of Harold Acton:

> "Gore Vidal turned up here the other day," Acton said. "He had a suitcase with him containing the body of his dog which had died in

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> Rome. He wanted to bury it in the garden here."
>
> "Which you arranged for him?"
>
> "Of course—so like Gore."

Shortly thereafter, Powell notes, Vidal published "a distinctly tart piece" about Acton in *The New York Review of Books*. One fears for the sanctity of Fido's remains.

Another source of delight is Powell's knack for evoking milieux. As in *Dance*, he conjures up, with a few sure strokes, whole vivid tidepools of English social life, each with its delicate anemones and truculent crustaceans. Here he is on Garsington, lair of Lady Ottoline Morrell:

> Garsington conditions have often been described, emphasis usually laid on the exotic appearance and behaviour of the hostess, both of which certainly had to be reckoned with. The worst perplexities always seemed to me to lie rather in the utter uncertainty as to what level of life there was to be assumed by the guest. A sense of "pre-war" constraint—or rather what one imagined that to be—always prevailed, in fact probably more characteristic of contemporary Bloomsbury than the *beau monde* of earlier days. There was also, I can now see (Harold Acton's memoirs bear this out), a war between the generations; young men from Oxford welcome as much to be overawed as encouraged.
>
> At Garsington one more or less wild man was likely to be present, a bohemian exhibit (in Wyndham Lewis's phrase, an Ape of God), making appropriately bohemian remarks. To have these comments addressed to oneself, especially during the many silences that fell, was something to be dreaded. Alternatively, you might be caught out, in quite a different manner, by forgetting, say, the date of Ascot, or the name of some nobleman's "place."

Yet another Powellian forte much in evidence here is the piquantly improbable comparison: he observes likenesses of one sort or another between Orwell and Lord Byron; Cyril Connolly and Ronald Knox; and (my personal favorite) John Betjeman and Yukio Mishima. Allied to this is a fascination with strange bedfellows and absurd coincidences. Did you know that Msgr. Knox and Siegfried Sassoon are buried next to each other, or that John Heygate, who broke up Waugh's marriage to Evelyn Gardner, was almost named Evelyn himself (after his ancestor John Evelyn), which would have made the ghastly mess an affair of *three* Evelyns?

Perhaps more to the point, do you care? A trio of Evelyns, another of Osberts: such bagatelles will be lapped up like cream by proper Anglophiles but leave all others cold. Powell himself acknowledges the occasional slightness of his material, but, as he says in defense of an anecdote about dancing with Tallulah Bankhead, "The period flavour of the incident must excuse its triviality." So must the signature tang of his *mots justes*. When, for instance, he says of Somerset Maugham, next to whom he found himself seated at a luncheon, that he "took charge of the conversation at once, detonating a few near epigrams in the Nineties manner," the second verb shows the true, feather-light Powell touch; like John Aubrey, of whom he wrote a biography, he enjoyed a mastery of the "ideal phrase for describing people." Vexing though it is that he didn't even aspire in these memoirs (whose very title seems to hint at low ambitions) to the Olympian level of art sustained across *Dance*, they cannot help but partake of the precision, humor, and inviolable suavity that made Powell one of the old century's great writers.

A complicated business

Jeremy Treglown Romancing:
The Life and Work of Henry Green.
Random House, 368 pages, $25

reviewed by Sudip Bose

Henry Green was a rarity among the British modernists, for he used his daring experimental style in the service of social

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comedy. As a result, his books can be off-putting for some. He possessed little of the limpid ease of an Evelyn Waugh, say, while at the same time his subjects can seem trivial (on the surface, at any rate), lacking the weightiness of a Conrad or Joyce. His prose also proves difficult both for the reader seeking underlying themes and for the reader hungry for easy explication. Points of view shift rapidly and abruptly. Green's heroes behave unheroically. And there is an abstract quality in the images and symbols that can defy immediate understanding. But few novelists have as brilliantly made art out of the small daily events of people's lives. The gerundial titles of several of his books —*Loving*, *Party Going*, *Doting*—suggest movement, action, the process of living. Indeed, whether his setting was the grim industrial world of the factory or the dining rooms of posh London hotels, Green's characters are constantly struggling to live, trying to make sense of what a complicated business living really is.

Green altered his style so dramatically from book to book that each novel seems almost to have been composed by a different hand—from *Blindness* (1926), a youthful caprice of a book, to the self-consciously made *Living* (1929), with its frequent omissions of definite articles (something Green picked up from C. M. Doughty), to the dense and symbolic *Party Going* (1939), perhaps the writer's most enduring book, to the late novels *Nothing* (1950) and *Doting* (1952), in which dialogue, deceptive and hilarious, dominates, and in which the authorial role has been seemingly reduced to mere scene-setting, lathed right out of the narrative.

The same writer who could produce the gritty descriptions of industrial life that make up *Living* could also render the most luxuriant of scenes: the shimmering prelude to Jane Weatherby's party in *Nothing*, for example, or the unforgettable sequence in *Party Going* in which the exquisite and narcissistic Amabel emerges from her bath, traces her name in the steamed-up looking glass, and gazes at the "faint pink mass" of her body (a body Renoir would have surely adored) until the image dissipates. Even on a single page Green could exhibit great rhetorical variety. Here he is opening his sixth novel, *Back* (1946), with an almost childlike simplicity:

> A country bus drew up below the church and a young man got out. This he had to do carefully because he had a peg leg.
>
> The roadway was asphalted blue.
>
> It was a summer day in England.

Just a few sentences later, however, we encounter complex syntax, clever wordplay, and prose-poetic quality:

> For, climbing around and up these trees of mourning, was rose after rose after rose, while, here and there, the spray overburdened by the mass of flower, a live wreath lay fallen on a wreath of stone, or on a box in marble colder than this day, or onto frosted paper blooms which, under glass, marked each bed of earth wherein the dear departed encouraged life above in the green grass, the cypresses and in those roses gay and bright which, as still as this dark afternoon, stared at whosoever looked, or having their heads to droop, to grow stained, to die when their turn came.

In this elegiac churchyard scene, which describes Charley Summers's search for the headstone of his beloved Rose, we see one hallmark of the Green style, the counterpoint of imagery. The live wreath compared to the dead bodies underground, the brightness of the roses contrasting with the darkness of the day, the climbing up versus the drooping down—all of this suggests the complex emotions cresting and subsiding in Charley, a wounded young man recently returned from war.

As Jeremy Treglown writes in his fine biography of the writer, Green was one of the most elusive of novelists, treasuring anonymity as much as he did female companionship and the bottle. He was born Henry Yorke, in Gloucestershire in 1905, though he

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never wrote under that name. Shy and reclusive, he disclosed to the public only the barest essentials of his life's story. He avoided being photographed, consenting only if his back was facing the lens. Among his own social set, the Eton and Oxford crowd (his friends included Anthony Powell and Evelyn Waugh), Green felt out of place, never comfortable with the upper-class milieu that was his inheritance. He would have surely recoiled from our own market-driven age, with its book tours and author signings and the frenetic drive for publicity.

Early on in life, Green developed a passion for the "lives of apparently insignificant people," for the working class, a passion more akin to Orwell than to Powell or Waugh. He relished urban life, found comfort in crowds. "He did not share the fear of the masses that obsessed some earlier modernist writers," Treglown explains.

> On the contrary, he seems to have literally found safety in numbers, while seeing firsthand that the apparently cramped and impoverished surroundings of working people could give a special sharpness to any kind of visual beauty: urban flowers and birds, the play of sunlight in water dripping from a tap.

The denouement of *Blindness*, a novel Green began during his last year at Eton, finds the blind John Haye abandoning "an anachronistic, feudal, rural world" and embracing "a life in which the sheer vibration of traffic on the streets brings him happiness."

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that in January 1927, Green, fed up with Oxford life, went to work in his father's Birmingham factory, which produced brewery and plumbing equipment, not as an official but as a laborer—though he would later move into the boardroom. For two years, he worked among people his friends might have found repulsive, listening to the idiosyncrasies of their speech. All the while, he sought, in the manner of the French naturalists, "to record 'scientifically' the prosaic details of everyday life and the structures of class and power that they expressed."

The experience gave him *Living*. It also added a particular vitality to the scenes Green later wrote centering upon crowds and ordinary people. A wonderful contrast is made, for example, in *Party Going*, between the shallow, self-absorbed, well-to-do travelers holed up in the railway station hotel, the fog preventing their departure, and the great menacing masses outside. This vast crowd of servants and commoners could, one feels, burst in at any moment, despite the locked front doors, and do considerable harm to those inside. Green was as skilled a recorder of ordinary lives as he was a satirist of the upper classes.

At home, Green's relationship with his wife, Dig, was stable, though not, it seems, fulfilling enough to prevent his many love affairs. And his views on children, that men who want them are merely deluding themselves, seem consistent with the way Henry and Dig often neglected their son, Sebastian. (In *Back*, Green reduces childbearing to mere perpetuation of the species, a process stripped entirely of love.) In 1943, while revising his fourth novel, *Caught*, the writer had an affair with a woman named Mary Keene. She became pregnant, and there was some question as to whether Green was the father. Dubious paternity plays a part in *Back*, with Charley doubting whether Rose's son is actually his. And in *Nothing*, Mary Pomfret thinks that her father, John, might also be the father of her potential husband, Philip.

The Henry Green emerging from Treglown's portrait is a somewhat unfeeling, self-absorbed man given to spells of loneliness and depression. As a boy, Treglown reports, Green found himself unable to mourn his brother's death from leukemia. Not long afterward, his parents, traveling through Mexico, were involved in a railway accident; though they survived, the good news did not make it back to England for some time, a period during which Green again felt little sadness. This difficulty in responding to death takes a comic turn in a novel such as *Nothing*: Arthur Morris, who

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hovers in the background of the narrative, slowly gets sicker and sicker, and though the principal characters gossip constantly about him while consuming expensive lunches, they do so flippantly, as if the illness isn't quite real. Then the poor bloke dies, and we don't know whether to laugh or cry.

Green's depression only intensified with his increasingly unquenchable thirst for drink and led eventually to the severing of friendships. On Christmas Eve in 1942, he wrote to Waugh: "How we came to part or how I came home I dont know. Am very depressed, lonely, & overworked." By the 1950s, Waugh was brutally gossiping about Green's physical and mental state; Powell "found him simply offensive." Green's father, Vincent Yorke, thought his son a failure, not only as an industrialist but also as a writer, simply because the books—nine novels and a memoir—did not sell. All the critical acclaim Green received mattered little to him. At the end of his life, Green descended into a miserable state: watching television, continuing to drink, clutching hot-water bottles, his hands perpetually cold. By the time he died of bronchial pneumonia in the winter of 1973, he hadn't published a book in twenty-one years.

Treglown writes that one of the themes of *Party Going*—and indeed this is true of several other Green novels—is the "impossibility of . . . knowing anything certain about other people." The same could be said of the elusive Green. Despite this, Treglown gives us a detailed, sympathetic portrait of the artist that consists of equal parts biographical detail and literary analysis. If this sensitive book brings more readers to Green's novels, helps elevate him from the status of "writer's writer's writer," as the Beat novelist Terry Southern once described him, it will have succeeded. A terrible thing it is that Green isn't more widely read, mentioned, and written about today. Green knew, as Treglown writes, that bathos was "much truer to life than pathos" and that "most of the dramas in most people's lives fail to transform anything." In this regard, he was a novelist of everyman.

A deadly game

Patrick Marnham
The Death of Jean Moulin:
Biography of a Ghost.
John Murray, 290 pages, £20

reviewed by Jeffrey Meyers

Walking through the market squares of Midi towns, amidst French shoppers wearing sandals and carrying string bags, one often sees bronze statues of the Resistance hero Jean Moulin gazing down on the leisurely crowd like a benign deity. Patrick Marnham's lucid, dramatic, and riveting biography cuts through the legend and, moving deftly through extremely complex material, solves the mystery of who betrayed Moulin to the Germans in June 1943. "To know who he was," Marnham subtly observes, "you must find out who killed him."

In this engagingly short biography, which complements Ian Ousby's excellent book *The Occupation: The Ordeal of France, 1940–1944* (1998), Marnham concentrates on interpreting the major events of Moulin's life. While Moulin occasionally fades into the French underground, Marnham gives a first-rate account of the social, political, and military situation. His caustic comments, for example, on the disgracefully opportunistic politics of Simone de Beauvoir are dead on. During the occupation, he notes, with a keen eye for vivid detail, the suicide rate dropped, the birth rate (despite the loss of nearly two-million French prisoners of war) rose and, for lack of proper food, the growth of school-age children slowed.

Two historical points need clarification. Hitler's *Nacht und Nebel* ("Night and Fog") decree of December 1941, which ordered that violent militia action against German forces be punished by death, was given that name (according to Field Marshal Keitel's *Memoirs*) because the accused "were to be hauled across the frontier under 'cover of darkness'" and secretly executed in Germany. Marnham twice says, without ex-

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plaining why, that Roosevelt disliked and distrusted de Gaulle. After meeting de Gaulle at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, Roosevelt felt he was a megalomaniac who wanted to establish a dictatorship in postwar France. "The day he arrived," Roosevelt said, "he thought he was Joan of Arc and the following day he insisted he was Georges Clemenceau."

Moulin was born in Béziers in southern France—the son of a radical and freemason, a teacher and influential local politician with ancestral roots in a Provençal village—in 1899. That extraordinary year also produced Hemingway, Nabokov, Borges, Hart Crane, Allen Tate, Noël Coward, Elizabeth Bowen, Hitchcock, and Bogart. All of them were solidly anchored in the nineteenth century, came to maturity during World War I, flowered during the artistic resurgence of the 1920s, lived through the economic depression and what Auden called "the low dishonest decade" of the 1930s, and (except for Crane) experienced the horrors of World War II.

In 1918 Moulin joined the engineers, was trained as a sapper, but did not see action. After earning a law degree at Montpellier, he joined the high-powered provincial administrators, the *Corps préfectoral*, and became the youngest sub-prefect and then the youngest prefect in France. His meteoric success was due "to his ferocious ambition, to his astounding ability as an administrator . . . to his personal connections and the influence of his father—what the French call *le piston*." After a marriage, arranged by his father, that lasted for only two years, the charming and charismatic Moulin—also a bit of a playboy—had a series of *sage* mistresses, often juggling three of them at the same time. He amusingly described his seduction technique (right out of a Billy Wilder movie) as "a few languorous tangos, several glasses of champagne. . . . At two o'clock in the morning there were no taxis, but plenty of hotel rooms . . . . 'But I have no pyjamas,' 'Don't worry, I'll lend you mine.' . . . Cue the violins."

Transferred from Chambéry in Savoy to Quimper in Brittany, Moulin fell under the influence of the homosexual artist and Catholic convert Max Jacob, who encouraged his work as an artist. Moulin signed his paintings with the pseudonym "Romanin," the name of the castle near his Provençal village. He would later use the name for the art gallery he ran in Nice—a convenient wartime cover. In a passage that effectively synthesizes Moulin's character in 1934, Marnham notes that he was a secretive man with a talent for duplicity and "the social habits of a libertine, a weekend painter with an acknowledged gift for caricature, attentive from a distance to his elderly parents and still without any particular political commitment."

During the Spanish Civil War, whose bloodthirsty factionalism foreshadowed that of the French Resistance, Moulin helped smuggle aircraft to the Loyalists. His first transforming moment came in June 1940, when, as prefect in the provincial capital of Chartres, he remained behind after everyone else had fled and formally surrendered the town to the Germans. After being abandoned by their French officers, some Senegalese troops fought the invaders and caused considerable casualties. When they were captured, the infuriated Nazi commander, contrary to the rules of war, had more than two hundred of them shot. To cover up the massacre, the Germans ordered Moulin to sign a document stating—in opposition to the evidence he had seen with his own eyes—that the black troops had been executed for raping and murdering women and children. When Moulin refused to sign and sully the honor of the African soldiers, he was beaten for seven hours. When he could no longer stand the torture, he tried to kill himself by cutting his throat with a piece of broken glass.

His courage seemed to "atone" for his noncombatant role in the Great War. He also expressed his idealistic opposition to the German contamination of France and the cowardly collaboration of the Vichy leaders ("who were piling up the stones

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which would cover their own graves") as well as his belief in the future of a free France. Moulin's self-sacrificial behavior established his reputation as one of the first heroes of the Resistance.

Dismissed as prefect, Moulin began to organize the rudimentary resisters in the southern, or unoccupied zone, nominally controlled by Vichy. In October 1941 he secretly left France and was flown from Lisbon to England to meet de Gaulle. Despite his left-wing background, he won the leader's trust. After a crash course in parachute jumping, Moulin was sent back into France. His mission, as de Gaulle's ambassador, was to unite the three main Resistance movements into one. But he soon became entangled in "the childish and deadly game" played by the explosive factions of the underground. The danger and strain became so great that he once lost control during an argument, dropping his trousers to express disdain for his adversary. His enemies (who should have been his allies in the war against Germany) accused him of "abusing his power, misusing his funds and reimposing the political chaos of the Third Republic." The left charged him with working to establish a Gaullist dictatorship, the right called him a Communist agent, though he'd long since lost faith in Communism.

In June 1943 the leaders met in a suburb of Lyon to replace their military commander, who'd been captured and shot. At this fateful time, Moulin was

> faced with the German police and the French police, with his numerous enemies within the patriotic resistance, with his rivals in the Gaullist security service and his former comrades in the PCF [French Communist Party]. For him it was not a question of who would betray him, but of how many of them would do so.

In a masterful display of detection Marnham eliminates not only the chief suspect, René Hardy, who was acquitted of betraying Moulin in two postwar trials, but also all of the French resisters who attended the meeting. Marnham convincingly concludes that "the men controlling the Communist resistance had the strongest possible motives for removing de Gaulle's representative from the scene and enjoyed every opportunity to do so." Arrested by Klaus Barbie, the "butcher of Lyon," and tortured by the Gestapo for the second time in three years, Moulin again refused to talk. Eluding for a moment the vigilance of his guards, he threw himself down a great stairwell and ensured his own silence by dying for France.

After the war Raymond Aubrac, the leading Communist at the meeting, whose presence "helped to screen the identity of the informers," became Commissioner of Marseille. He organized a reign of terror (unequaled since the French Revolution) in which thousands of innocent political victims were accused of collaboration and executed. His wife, Lucie, another covert Communist "submarine," had tried to murder René Hardy by sending him a pot of jam laced with cyanide: "When he failed to eat the jam she regarded his suspicious caution as a final confirmation of his guilt."

In 1997 the exciting French film *Lucie Aubrac*, based on her book, portrayed Raymond's capture by the Gestapo (after the Lyon meeting) in October 1943 and her bold rescue of Raymond and twelve other resisters, which made them legends. The film idealizes the Aubracs and says nothing at all about Lucie's attempt to poison the innocent Hardy to protect the Communist traitors or Raymond's massacre of the innocents in postwar Marseille. It's an effective example of what Marnham (who doesn't mention the film) calls "murdering history." In 1964 Moulin's ashes (or those thought to be his) were buried in the Panthéon—next to Voltaire, Hugo, and Zola—after a theatrical but moving oration by André Malraux. Marnham observes, in another telling phrase, that "lacking a body they reburied a ghost, and a patriotic legend was born." Marnham shows that de Gaulle used Moulin to help create an essential

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myth about France's experience in the war. Instead of a country that abjectly submitted in the Occupied Zone and collaborated under the Vichy government, "de Gaulle had imposed a false view of France as a country of resistance."

Symbols & syntax

Denis Donoghue
Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot.
Yale University Press, 326 pages, $26.95

reviewed by Paul Dean

Denis Donoghue takes his title from a line of Yeats's: "Words alone are certain good." Yeats may have believed this, but Eliot didn't and nor does Donoghue. His book begins as an intellectual autobiography, an awkward framework, which he soon discards, though preserving an agreeably personal tone which never becomes slack or self-indulgent. His preoccupation with the philosophy of language is not of the fashionable kind—Wittgenstein is mentioned only once in passing, with more frequent references to Bradley, Hegel, and Kant. Yet we also encounter Adorno, Habermas, and Heidegger; here, for once, is someone who has taken the measure of postmodernism and can make intelligent use of it, without supposing that it supersedes all previous thought.

Donoghue uses Eliot to throw into relief the inadequacies of that laureate of the Enlightenment, Wallace Stevens, who is bitingly censured: "The main difference between the pope and Wallace Stevens is that the pope does not claim to have invented, or to have deduced from his private desires, the articles of his belief." Stevens is presented as a transcendentalist in the Emerson-Thoreau tradition, which Eliot pronounced "the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity." Stevens took for granted the bankruptcy of Christianity, elaborating in its stead an Arnoldian cultural theology, in which God is replaced by imagination, adherence to a church by membership of an intellectual elite, prayer by poetic rumination, and ultimate truth by the supreme fiction. In all this he is an antitype of Eliot. "All men are priests," Stevens proclaims in "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas"; to which Donoghue brutally responds: "Is that all Stevens's creed comes to, a self-deluding Humanism? . . . His poems assume that having a feeling is enough; there is no warrant for interrogating it."

The difference between Eliot and Stevens—who dismissed *The Waste Land* as "negligible" and "a bore," while quietly appropriating some of Eliot's techniques—raises questions, Donoghue argues, about modernism, specifically the nature and function of poetic symbolism and its relation to syntax. In his early poetry, Eliot borrowed Laforgue's trick of juxtaposing situations and moods while abstaining from syntactic connexion. Donoghue contends that it is a distinctive mark of modernist poetry that its words possess "relations . . . not prescribed or predictive but experimental." In contrast to classical poetry, which is "organized on the assumption that nature is continuous; hence the primacy of syntax" and whose words are therefore subject to a causal grammar, modernist poetry treats words as "independent and therefore vulnerable." This is pressed rather too hard, for, after all, the words in *any* poem establish formal relations among themselves merely by coming one after another: but one sees what Donoghue means; the broken syntax mimics the broken world. Yet Eliot's quotations, allusions, and echoes invest his poems with a literary authority independent of that world. This introduces a major theme of *Words Alone*: Eliot's compulsion to transcend the personal—a trait which, paradoxically, underlies his weakest as well as his greatest poetry.

Eliot's verbal universe, before his conversion, is claustrophobic. Through Prufrock, Gerontion, and his other personae, he grapples with the same subject as he perceived in *Hamlet*: the agony of having a capacity

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for consciousness that surpasses any use to which one can put it. This extreme self-awareness is also, as he accepted from his study of F. H. Bradley, an extreme isolation, which, if unchecked, can turn to solipsism. Donoghue quotes from Eliot's book on Bradley: "It is only in immediate experience that knowledge and its object are one. . . . Experience is non-relational." Yet this does not lead to the kind of poem Yeats wrote; it is Yeats, rather than Eliot, who reminds us of Mallarmé. Eliot's range of tones, his diversity of styles, his mélange of languages are devices for escaping from solitary confinement. This is supremely true in *The Waste Land*, which Donoghue approaches, fascinatingly, as "an American romance," somewhat like *The Great Gatsby* (a book Eliot admired). Distrusting the principle of the eternal new start—which Henry James, for one, saw as basic to the American character—Eliot accepted the authority of tradition, while employing the modernist syntax referred to above: the result is "not a seamless narrative, but a set of lyric moments, each isolated for consciousness." A symbolist poem would stop there, but *The Waste Land* goes further. Using the "mythical method" he acclaimed in *Ulysses*, Eliot pointed beyond words, beyond the self, to a higher consciousness which includes but transcends them. This is not Tiresias, for his is only yet another perspective: the transcendence is enacted by the trajectory of the whole poem, in which language is seen as "a great treasury of images and figures and, increasingly in Eliot, identified with the Word of God." Eliot turned romanticism's idolatry (as he saw it) of the imagination against itself: the "heap of broken images" has the significance of pieces of mosaic rather than of shards of glass.

On all the early poetry, Donoghue is fresh, stimulating, and attentive to details, whether elucidating the Virgilian element in "La Figlia che Piange," detecting the presence of Yeats as well as Henry Adams behind "Gerontion," or glossing "Marina" by referring to Eliot's own wondering awakening to Christian faith. Turning to the post-conversion poetry, he distinguishes the "doctrine professed" from the "doctrine felt"; Eliot doesn't insist that we share his belief, he only asks us to imagine what belief is like. That is well said, but this part of Donoghue's book causes more unease, especially when he refers to Eliot's "spiritual genius." I'm unhappy with that phrase, and believe Eliot would have been too; he wouldn't want to offer himself as a director of souls or a model of holy life. "It would be absurd," Donoghue says, "to repeat the canard that Eliot hated life and longed only to be rid of it." Hatred is too strong a word, but, at least until his second marriage, Eliot displayed fear of life, even revulsion against it—witness his obsessive insistence on original sin and his decision, in Donoghue's words, "to regard human relations as provisional and ancillary to some relation beyond them." In the early poetry, where he is asking agonized questions, he avoided the disabling abstraction this would imply; later, however, when his concern was to proffer answers, he often gave in to it.

Donoghue sympathizes with Eliot's detractors to a daring degree. He admits that the *Four Quartets* are "meditative poems, dealing with their objects at the remove of contemplation and generalization"; that Eliot was obliged to maintain that this world is worthless yet that God became incarnate in order to redeem it; that his rhetoric depends heavily on negative tropes, whether of purging or of renunciation. We may find defects where Donoghue finds virtues, but when we disagree with him, it is with respect, as with a friend. He admirably exhibits the same scrupulousness which he praises in his author; everyone who really cares about Eliot's work should salute this book.

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Letters

Boswell's "Life"

To the Editors:

I am grateful for the flattering review of the British edition of my book *Boswell's Presumptuous Task* in your March issue. Since your reviewer kindly remarks on the absence of errors, it may seem churlish to contradict him, but, in the interests of accuracy, I must correct his one correction. In his accession speech, George III did say "I glory in the name of Britain," not "Briton." This also gives me the opportunity to point out that my book will be published in America by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in August.

Adam Sisman
Bath, England

John Derbyshire replies

I am flattered that Mr. Sisman has noticed my review of his very fine book, to which I wish all success here in the United States. The difference of opinion to which he refers came about as follows. Reading his use of the word "Britain" in that quotation, I recalled my school history text printing it as "Briton." I therefore went to my *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (second edition, 1955) for a ruling. That authority gives:

> Born and educated in this country I glory in the name of Briton. (Speech from the Throne, 1760)

Armed with this, and with my own instinct that "Briton" makes much more sense in the context than "Britain," I passed the remark to which Mr. Sisman has taken exception. If I was wrong, I am sorry, but I cannot feel very much abashed, since I am wrong in such good company.

We mourn the passing of Daniel J. Silver

1952–2001

A valued contributor to The New Criterion

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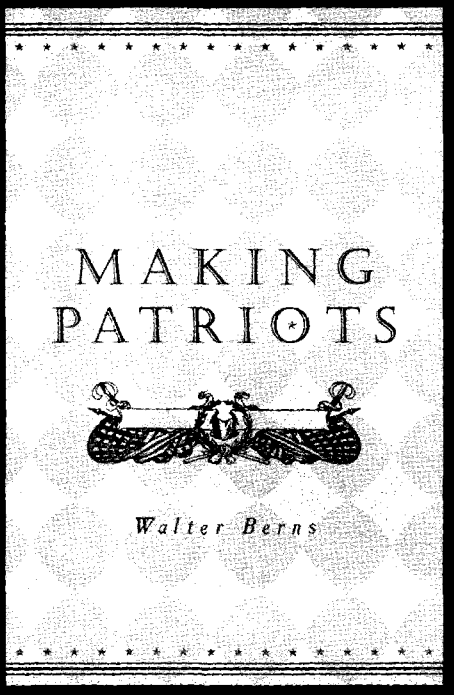

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- **H** **Edward De Bono:** *How to Change Ideas* (55 min.)
- **I** **Robert Frost:** *An Evening with Robert Frost* (55 min.)
- **J** **Erich Fromm:** *To Have or to Be: The Nature of the Psyche* (56 min.)
- **K** **Buckminster Fuller:** *Twentieth-Century Renaissance* (55 min.)
- **L** **Thor Heyerdahl:** *Waters of the World* (58 min.)
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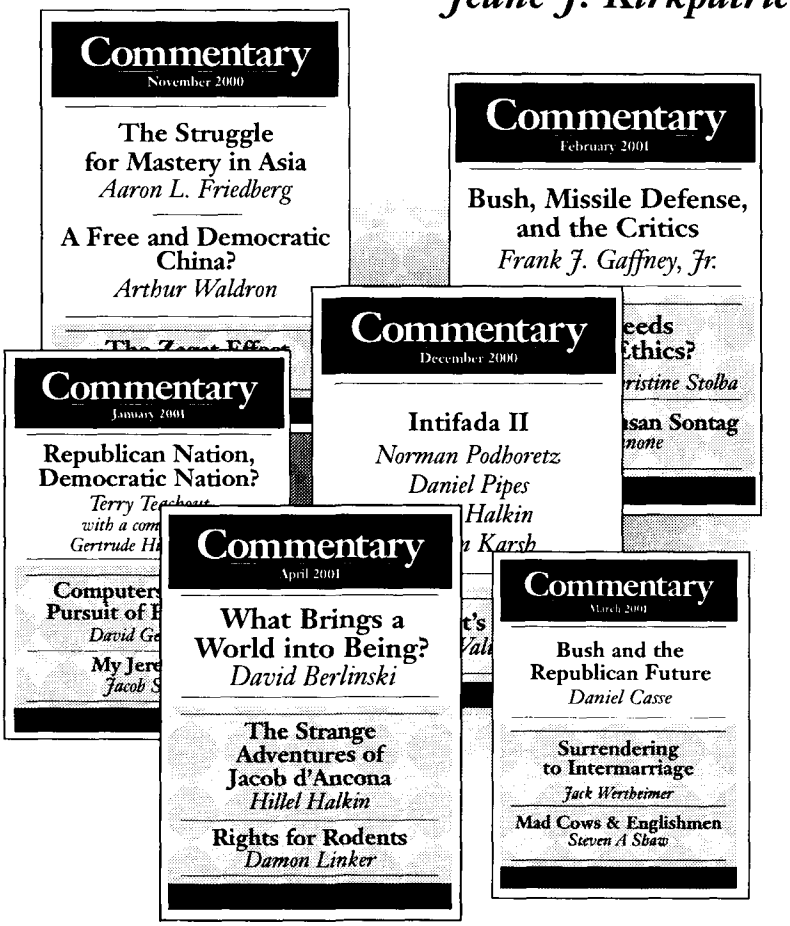

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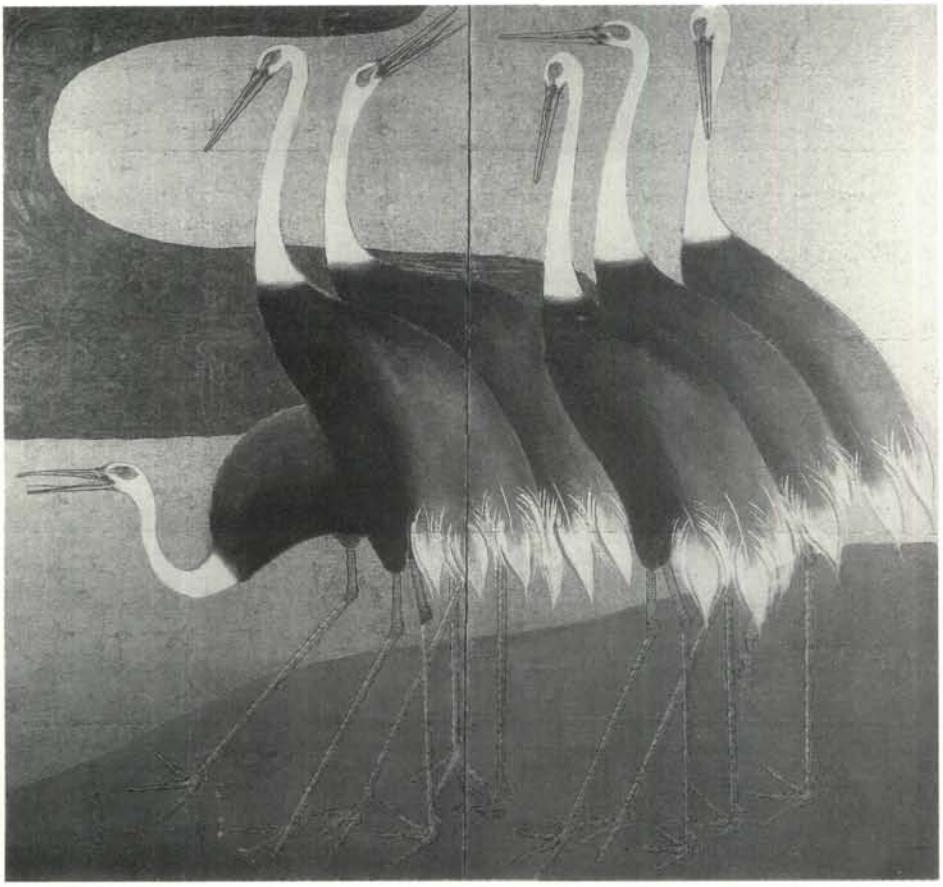

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